WARREN MAGAZINE

EERIE

$1.00
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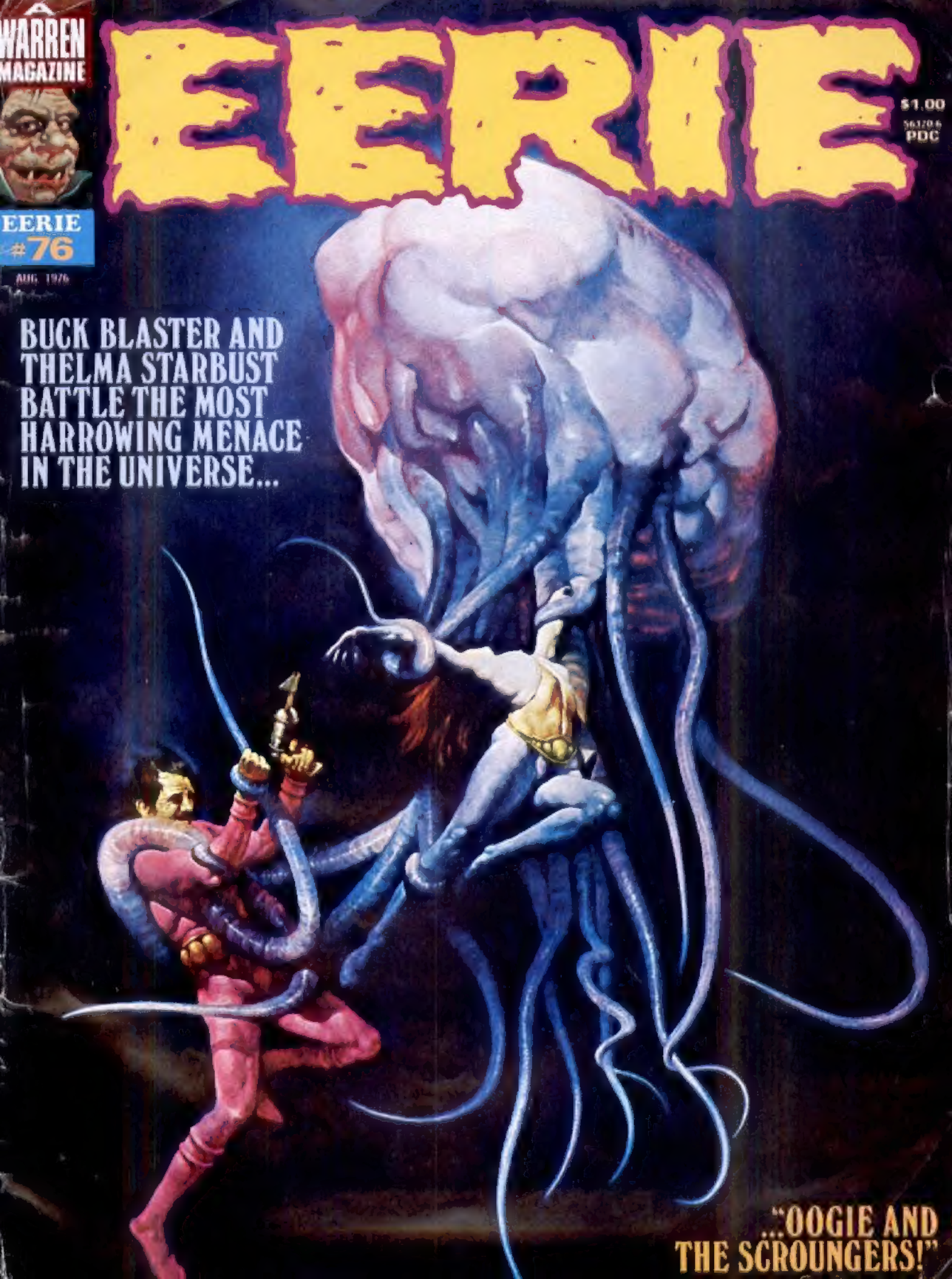
EERIE
#76
AUG. 1976

BUCK BLASTER AND THELMA STARBUST BATTLE THE MOST HARROWING MENACE IN THE UNIVERSE...



...OOGIE AND THE SCROUNGERS!"

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OUR COVER
Oogie and Thelma Starbust wage war against one of their most deadly foes, the agents of the IRS! This moody, magnificent cover of "The Scroungers" is by Sanjulian.

Editor-In-Chief
& Publisher
JAMES WARREN

Senior Editor
LOUISE JONES

Contributing Editor
BILL DuBAY

Art Production Manager
W.R. MOHALLEY

Production
JAMES IMES

Cover
SANJULIAN

Writers This Issue
JOSE BEA
JOE BRANCATELLI
BILL DuBAY
BUDD LEWIS
JIM STARLIN

Artists This Issue
JOSE BEA
LUIS BERMEJO
ESTEBAN MAROTO
JOSE ORTIZ
JIM STARLIN

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EERIE®

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ISSUE NO. 76
AUGUST 1976

4 **DEAR COUSIN EERIE** "Terrific!" writes an excited EERIE fan. "The variety is what I like!" exclaims another. "A western, science fiction, sword and sorcery and a chiller in one exciting issue!" EERIE #74 . . . an exciting crowd pleaser!

5 **DELIVER THE CHILD** Mr. Digger had conjured up the demon named Jahnte. Unfortunately, it was easier to call on a hellish imp than to control him. The angry demon, bent on revenge, would obey no one except his own horrible instincts!

15 **COMIC BOOKS: BRANCATELLI** With his sword of criticism sharpened to a razor's edge, Joe Brancatelli slashes away at the Comic Book Industry. He openly discusses: the lack of new blood, sales and what the "biggies" think of fans.

16 **WOLFER: HIGHSONG** Wolfer O'Connel had always been a brother to the Crow Indians. So why had they come to kill him? What was this "beast" they were babbling about? Wolfer had wit and courage . . . but was that enough to keep him alive?

24 **OOGIE: THE SCROUNGERS** Thelma Starbust, goddess of Oogie's planet, was prepared for invasions. Little green cannibals. Cyclotic giants. Bug-eyed octopi. Anything. But not the dreaded IRS! Anyway, the IRS shouldn't be able to tax a goddess.

37 **HYPNOS: THE SILVER KEY** The insulted artist picked Peter up . . . then hurled him through his painting into a mad wonderland. There only one goal made sense. Find the key. Unlock the door. Then leave. But there were thousands of keys!

47 **BEWARE DARKLON, MYSTIC** Four assassins had struck swiftly but not accurately. Darklon's concubine lay dead in his place. On her blood he swore his revenge but his search for the killers led him to his own house!

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Dear Cousin Eerie...

EERIE #74 presented two superior tales by one of my favorite writers, and made me realize how much story telling **approach** has to do with the impact of the stories themselves . . . an impact that goes far beyond mere plot or number of pages involved in the story. The first tale of interest was **Merlin: "A Secret King"** by **Budd Lewis.** This exciting and clever tale, based on the exploits of the mythic heroes of the **Arthurian** legend, became, in places, tedious and hard to follow. There was just too much intertwining of loosely related characters and subplots.

Obviously **Lewis** was attempting to create an epic ...and his twenty page narrative was certainly of epic proportions ...but he had enough material here for at least two or three stories. I only wish that he had handled it **that** way instead of cramming everything into this one tale.

The characters were realistically portrayed, the storyline was imaginative and I would like to see more of **Merlin** soon. Just ask **Lewis** to use a little restraint next time around!

The second story, which I would like to applaud, was also by **Lewis.** It was called "The Expedition."

It featured simpler, more direct story telling . . . the extreme opposite of his **Merlin** tale. The plot was less complicated, involving only two characters and a monster. In this tale he used his characters to maximum advantage ...allowing the horror to build naturally...slowly and effectively. "The Expedition" held my interest right to the end. The panel where the lurking beast grabs the hunter's hand underwater was frightening. Had I seen it in a movie, I would have leaped out of my seat. The uncomplicated art of **Leopold Sanchez** added immeasurably to the frightening mood of the story.

I loved it!

CLYDE OSTRAND
Summit, R.I.

Terror-ific! EERIE #74 was one of the best issues I have ever read! Although I enjoyed some stories more than others I have to admit that there wasn't a weak tale in the bunch.

And, though I usually don't like humor mixed with horror, "Demons of Jedediah Pan" was **really funny** . . . not silly-funny!

Paul Neary's art on "Father Creator" was terrific, as **Neary's** art usually is.

TED LEIGHTEN
Pottstown, Pa.

After blowing my hard earned bucks on bubble gum flavored ice cream and a couple of slices of pizza, I decided to lay down the green for some culture.

EERIE #74 was what I chose. Wow! From now on I'm going to forget the ice cream and pizza.

"A Secret King" by **Budd Lewis** was terrific and the art by **Gonzalo Mayo,** a true master, fit the story perfectly.

DOUG HELMER
El Segundo, Ca.

You'll be excited to learn, Doug, that a novel length VAMPIRELLA epic by Gonzalo Mayo is scheduled for VAMPIRELLA #54.

As much as I enjoy EERIE, at times the art seems excessively decorative.

Warren's foreign artists are fine illustrators...**that** no one can deny. But some of them put so much detail into their work that I have a hard time following the story.

Paul Neary is sometimes guilty of this. And **Gonzalo Mayo,** in particular, I find difficult to read. Each frame by itself is magnificent. But combine it with all the other pictures on the page and my eyes go crazy trying to decide what to look at first.

Artists like **Russ Heath, John Severin, Berni Wrightson, Rich Corben, Jose Ortiz** and **Wally Wood** know how to tell a tale clearly . . . with enough details to make the art interesting. Could we see more of these illustrators in future **Warren issues?**

PAUL DiNAZIO
Ramsey, Ont., Can.

You must have a crystal ball, Paul because you pretty much predicted the lineup for the upcoming Warren issues.

EERIE #77 promises a spectacular science fiction epic by Rich Corben titled "Within You, Without You."

CREEPY #83 will feature the incredible talents of Rich Corben (in color), Russ Heath, John Severin, Jose Ortiz and Berni Wrightson.

And Rich Corben will make a guest appearance in VAMPIRELLA #54 with the rescheduled, long lost "Bowser!"

Wally Wood is just too busy but for a talent like him the door is always open.

In **Warren's** most recent issue of EERIE (#74) there weren't **any** of the traditional creatures like vampires, werewolves, ghouls, or monsters.

Wait. I take that back. There was a swamp creature in "The Expedition" by **Budd Lewis** and **Leopold Sanchez** but it only appeared in three pictures on the last page. Not hardly enough!

I know what you're going to say. Those creatures become old hat when you do them too much... and anyway, what's wrong with just a good, scary story **without** monsters?

I say, **nothing** . . . but include at least two or three creepy creatures per issue. Have the non-creature stories as the **exception** . . . not the rule.

My favorite story of the issue was, of course, "The Expedition!"

GENE BENJAMIN
Kingsville, Tex.

I would like to begin my comments about EERIE #74 by lavishing praise, not only on **Ken Kelly's** excellent cover, but also on **Auraleon's** inside cover art. The choice of color showed incredible sophistication. The contrast between the bright orange front cover and the moody blue interior was quite a shock, akin to walking from daylight into a dark room. It was a good way to start the book and put me in the right frame of mind for a very fine issue.

"The Demons of **Jedediah Pan"** was an ironically humorous tale replete with sadism and revenge. The band of Mexican bandits who held the good "Dr. Bottles" in terror for his life, attempted to treat the old man with the demon bracelet in a similar manner . . . and came to solemnly regret that decision. **Pan's** hilariously bizarre approach to vengeance was fabulous.

Frito's band reminded me of the two assassins in **Ernest Hemingway's** celebrated tale "The Killers." Although the locals of the two stories were different, the theme of violent men terrorizing innocent people was the same.

The other stories in the magazine were up to the high **Warren** standards of quality and, as usual, I cannot wait until the next issue.

PETER AA
Council Bluffs, Iowa

EERIE #74 was a great issue and...what I especially enjoyed . . . a **varied** issue! A western! Science fiction! Sword and sorcery! And, to end it off, a chiller! In one fabulous magazine!

My favorite was "Father Creator" by **Bill DuBay,** with art by **Paul Neary.** This excellent story had what I think successful science fiction **should** have...a thought provoking plot coupled with an imaginative setting. The tale lacks the spectacular feats of action, which characterized **DuBay's Jedediah Pan,** this issue, and would have made "Father Creator" more entertaining. But, as the old saying goes, two out of three ain't bad.

I hope to continue to see variety in the future.

BILL RAGEN
Alexandria, Miss.

Delightful!

"A Secret King," the latest installment in the **Merlin** series, has eclipsed the other impressive **Budd Lewis/Gonzalo Mayo** collaboration, **El Cid.**

Mayo's sense of composition has improved significantly, disciplining his ornate splendor to powerful effect.

Lewis' Merlin, far from relying on the over worked plots that so often marred **El Cid,** evinced the imagination synonymous with **Lewis** at his best.

The distinct highlight of **Merlin** is deft characterization. **Lewis** has given us a **Merlin** we've never seen before . . . nor yet imagined. A **Merlin,** young, sardonic, even witty. A much more appealing character than the pompous sage of legend.

Merlin's familiar, **Snivel,** is a particularly effective creation. In her, we have a warrior maid who easily avoids the cliches which the label implies. **Mayo** endows her with a lush sensuality that does wonders with the female form. The result . . . a delight.

Merlin already ranks with the best of the **Warren** series (which is saying a lot) and I eagerly await its further development.

The rest of EERIE #74 paled by comparison. "The Demons of **Jedediah Pan"** utilized grotesque humor with uneven results.

Bill DuBay turned in a good script based on a derivative plot with "Father Creator," and **Paul Neary's** art masterfully carried the tale. By the way, the "son" in the story bore a distinct resemblance to **Michael Douglas** of "Streets of San Francisco" fame.

ED O'REILLY
Ada, Ohio

opinions? write...!

DEAR COUSIN EERIE
c/o Warren Publishing
145 E. 32nd Street
New York, N.Y. 10016

THE MOONWEAVERS

DELIVER THE CHILD

IN THE YEAR 1912, A CARAVAN OF HUMAN ODDITIES, *FREAKS* OF NATURE, CLANNED TOGETHER IN A ROAMING CARNIVAL SHOW, CAME TO *BISHOP, MISSOURI* ONE DARK AND OMINOUS AUTUMN MIDNIGHT.

A YOUNG BOY WITH A SPECIAL SENSE FELT THE COMING OF THE BIZARRE CARNIVAL. *JERRY ADPATRES* EMBROILED HIMSELF, HIS YOUNGER CRIPPLED BROTHER, *JOHN* AND THE ENTIRE TOWN OF BISHOP IN A STRANGE DRAMA OF LIFE AND DEATH THROUGH HIS POWERS OF RANDOM *MENTAL SENSITIVITY.* *

THE BOY, JERRY, NEVER FOUND TIME TO EXPLORE HIS UNUSUAL *GIFT.* HE TURNED IT INWARD AND *ADAPTED* TO HIS ROLE IN SOCIETY AS THE YEARS ROBBED HIM OF BOYHOOD. AND, ASIDE FROM AN OCCASSIONAL TINGLE BEFORE THE TELEPHONE RANG, OR A WIDDERSHIN NOTION THAT AUNT ELLEN WAS DYING, HE NEVER USED HIS SENSE, HIS VERY *SPECIAL SENSE,* AGAIN.

BUT, UNKNOWN TO THE ADULT AND FATHER, JERRY ADPATRES, HE PASSED IT ON INTO ANOTHER *WORLD.*

IT WAS *ANOTHER WORLD* WHICH OWNED JERRY ADPATRES' SPECIAL GIFT. AN EVER CHANGING WORLD. A WORLD WHICH THE CALENDAR MARKED AS *1936.* A WORLD ON ITS WAY INTO THE *FUTURE.* AND THE VEHICLE IN WHICH THAT SPECIAL ABILITY WAS RIDING TOWARD THE FUTURE WAS THE BRAIN AND BODY OF *GEROME ADPATRES,* AGED *TWELVE.*

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FATHER JERRY AND SON GEROME WAS, JERRY *NEVER REALIZED* WHAT HIS POWERS WERE. GEROME *DID.*

*SEE! "FREAKS: CARNIVAL AT MIDNIGHT" EERIE #73

STORY: BUDD LEWIS/ART: LEOPOLD SANCHEZ

IN THAT OLD NEIGHBORHOOD THERE WAS A VERY SINGULAR AND SPECIAL CLUB. THE CLUB WAS CALLED THE MOONWEAVERS. IT WAS A SELECT AND SECRET SOCIETY. THERE WERE ONLY TWO MEMBERS. GEROME WAS ONE.

THE OTHER, MOONWEAVER TWO, WAS THE SON OF A ONCE CRIPPLED BOY, JOHN APPATRES. JOHN AND JERRY WERE BROTHERS, CLOSE AS CLOSE COULD BE YEARS AGO. BUT NOW, THE PROBLEMS AND VEXATIONS OF ADULTHOOD HAD SEPERATED THEM FOREVER. IN THEIR PLACE, THEIR TWO SONS, GEROME AND JASON CARRIED ON THEIR EARLIER TRADITIONS OF CHILDHOOD.

THUS A SUDDEN MEETING OF THE MOONWEAVER SOCIETY WAS CONVENED BETWEEN THE TWO FIRST COUSINS... BOYS WHO SHARED A SECRET THAT TRANSCENDED EVEN THE CLOSENESS OF FAMILY RELATIONS, BROTHERHOOD AND SOLEMN SWORN SECRET OATHS. THEY SHARED A MYSTERY OF THE INFINITE.

THEY SHARED THE KNOWLEDGE. THE KNOWLEDGE THAT GEROME CARRIED A RECEIVER IN HIS BRAIN. A RECEIVER THAT PICKED UP QUEER THINGS. STRANGE THINGS. UNKNOWN THINGS. THINGS THAT WERE BETTER LEFT UNKNOWN.

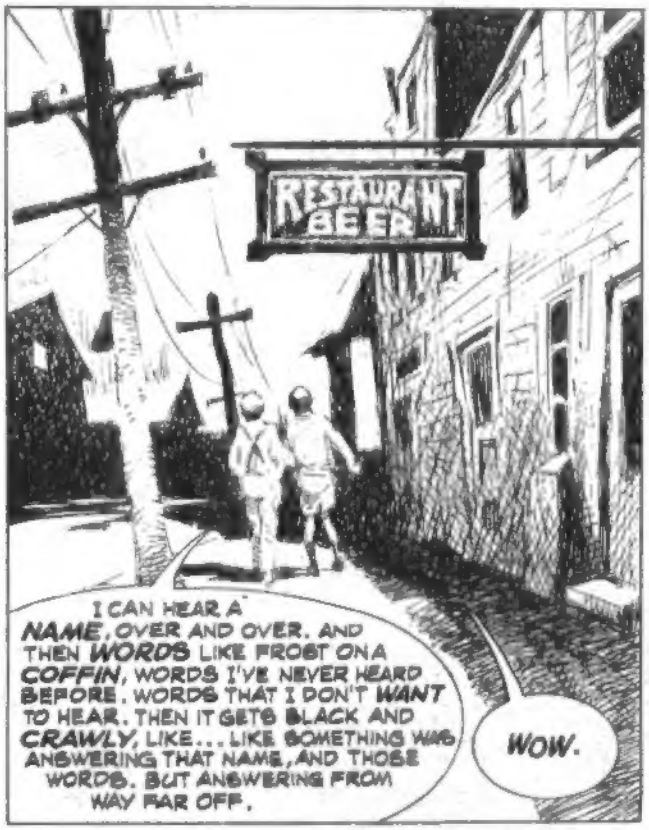
BUT IGNORING ENIGMAS WAS NOT THE PURPOSE OF THE MOONWEAVERS.

FOR, THEY BOTH UNDERSTOOD SOMETHING. WHATEVER IT WAS THAT GEROME CARRIED IN HIS HEAD WAS MORE FANTASTIC THAN BUCK ROGERS, MORE WONDERFUL THAT SPACE CADETS AND MORE THRILLING THAN A TRIP TO THE MOON IN A MARTIAN SPACESHIP.
BUT IT WENT BEYOND THAT. THEY REALIZED THE EXCITEMENT OF NEARING UNSPOKEN WORDS AND THOUGHTS, OF REACHING BEYOND THE REALMS OF AVERAGE LIFE AND TOUCHING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE UNIVERSE. THEY REALIZED THAT HERE, NOW, THEY HAD A CHANCE OF DOING THINGS THAT NO ONE ELSE IN BISHOP, MISSOURI COULD EVER DREAM OF DOING.
AND THEY REALIZED WHERE IT ALL MIGHT LEAD, AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT. THEY JUST MIGHT BE THE ONES TO ONE DAY SAVE THE ENTIRE WORLD. AND WHAT MADE THIS NIGHT ALL THE MORE EXCITING WAS . . .
HI!
JASON, YOU DIDN'T WEAR YOUR MOONWEAVER SHIRT! THIS IS GOING TO BE A MOONWEAVER JOB!
. . . THIS JUST MIGHT BE THE NIGHT!
YEAH, I KNOW. MY MOM MADE ME PUT IT IN THE WASH. SAID IT HADN'T BEEN WASHED IN FIVE WEEKS. YOU KNOW HOW MOM IS.
M
YEA, I KNOW. BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT. I'LL BET YOU DIDN'T EVEN BRING YOUR MOONWEAVER KNIFE OR YOUR FLASHLIGHT OR YOUR SCALING ROPE OR NOTHIN'!
WHAT KIND OF MOONWEAVER DO YOU THINK I AM, GERR?
THATABOY!

WHAT'S UP? WHAT DO YOU FEEL?
LIKE SOMETHING I NEVER FELT BEFORE. LIKE CRAZY RADIO WAVES CRASHING TOGETHER INSIDE MY HEAD. ALL BLACK, ALL VIOLENT, ALL CRAZY!

WOW! WHAT ELSE IS IT LIKE
LIKE... LIKE... COLD, OILY, OOZY WORMS, CRAWING UP AND DOWN MY MIND. REALLY SCAREY. IT COMES AND GOES. BUT IT'S COMING MORE AND MORE OFTEN NOW... GETTING STRONGER, WIERDER!

WOW!


RESTAURANT
BEER
I CAN HEAR A NAME, OVER AND OVER. AND THEN WORDS LIKE FROST ON A COFFIN, WORDS I'VE NEVER HEARD BEFORE. WORDS THAT I DON'T WANT TO HEAR. THEN IT GETS BLACK AND CRAWLY, LIKE... LIKE SOMETHING WAS ANSWERING THAT NAME, AND THOSE WORDS. BUT ANSWERING FROM WAY FAR OFF.
WOW.

WHICH WAY IS IT COMING FROM, GERR?
SEEMS... SEEMS TO BE COMING FROM THERE. NO, NOT THERE. I KEEP LOSING IT. WAIT, IT'S STRONGER NOW. THERE. SORT OF.

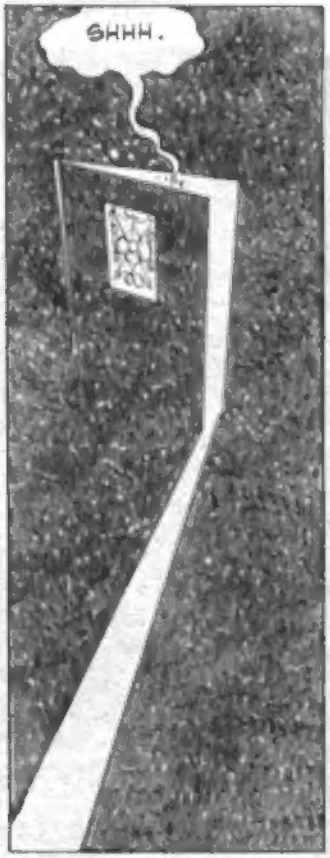
NO! IT'S VERY STRONG NOW! I HEAR THAT NAME AGAIN! A... A MAN'S VOICE, CALLING A NAME. THE NAME IS JOHN, JOHNY! JOHNY! FROM THERE! THAT WAY!

LET'S GO, MOONWEAVERS!
YES, PERHAPS THIS WOULD BE THE NIGHT THEY WOULD SAVE THE WORLD FROM A HORROR NEVER BEFORE KNOWN TO MORTAL MAN. PERHAPS TONIGHT.

TWELVE YEARS OLD... TWENTY FOUR HOURS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MOMENTS OF THEIR BIRTHS, THEY HAD SHARED *SECRETS* PERHAPS EVEN BEFORE THEY BREATHED THE BREATH OF LIFE. AND ON THE WINGS OF THOSE ANCIENT SECRETS, THAT SINGULAR *COMRADERY*, THEY FLEW INTO THE NIGHT LIKE TWO YOUNG WILD CHARIOT STEEDS, HARNESSED TO A COMMON REIN.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? DO WE GO IN?
WE'VE GOT TO, JASE. THERE'S NO OTHER WAY WE'RE GOING TO FIND OUT WHO'S DOING WHAT IN THERE.
YOU SCARED?

AS I CAN BE!


SHHH.

HEY, GERR, SOMEBODY LIVES HERE!
I KNOW. I CAN SENSE IT. A MAN. A LADY. AND A BABY. I THINK THE LADY AND THE BABY ARE ASLEEP UPSTAIRS.
WHERE'S THE MAN?

I DON'T KNOW! JASON! I'VE GOT TO FIND HIM! HE'S DOING THIS! THE NOISE, THE SOUND, THE FEELING... IT'S GETTING ME. GETTING ME!

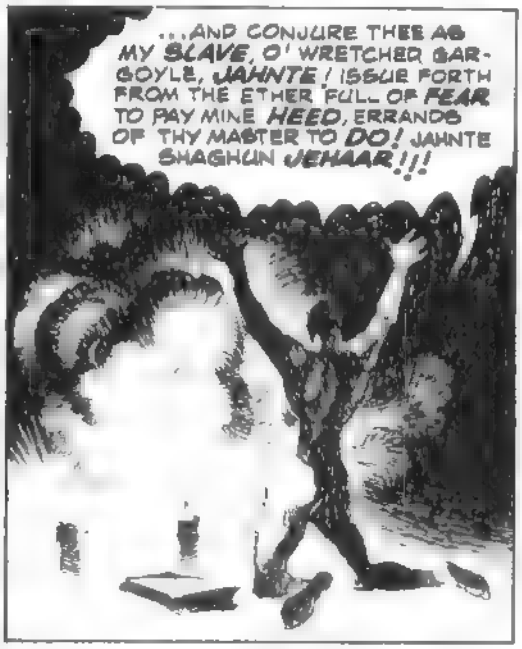
THERE, JASE! BEHIND THAT DOOR. CRAWLING, COLD WORMS ARE COMING OUT FROM UNDER THAT DOOR!

COME ON, GEROME! WE'VE GOT TO GO IN THERE.
NO! I CAN'T IT'S TOO HORRIBLE. I DON'T WANT TO SEE IT!

DON'T YOU WANT TO SEE THE UNKNOWN, MOONWEAVER ONE?
YOU'RE... YOU'RE RIGHT, MOONWEAVER TWO. LET'S GO!

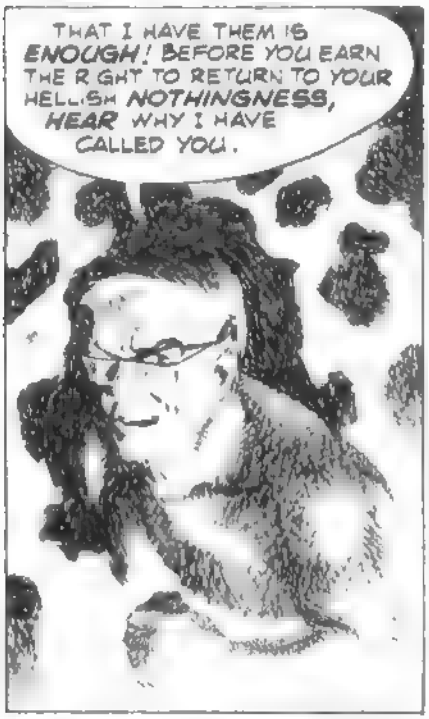
BESIDES... I'VE GOT TO GET HIM TO STOP DOING THIS TO MY HEAD! CHEEZ! ITS SPLITTING MY SKULL APART.

AT LAST, THE MOONWEAVERS WERE ABOUT TO LOOK FULL FACE UPON THE UNKNOWN. THIS WOULD BE THE MOMENT THEY HAD LIVED ALL THEIR LIVES FOR. WHAT THEY HAD CHASED ON A THOUSAND SUMMER NIGHTS ACROSS DARK YARDS, SLIMEY DITCHES, THORN HEDGES FOR. A THOUSAND DEAD ENDS. A THOUSAND DISAPPOINTMENTS. A THOUSAND MISDIRECTED SIGNALS. NO MORE FAMILY ARGUMENTS, CATS UP TREES, LOST DOGS AND KIDS, TINGLING WARNINGS OF ELDERLY DEATHS. THIS WAS WHAT THEY HAD SEARCHED FOREVER FOR. GEROME'S SENSE HAD PAID OFF AT LAST.



I, CHARLES JACOB DIGGERS! I CALL YOU FORTH, SUCKLING DEMON! I CALL YOU FORTH AND ENSLAVE YOU TO SERVE ME EVER AND ANON!
YOU HAVE SPOKENNN THE LOSSSST WORDS TO CALL.HOW COME YOUUUU BY THE WORDSSS?

YOU'D LOVE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO RIP MY GUTS FROM MY CHEST, WOULDN'T YOU, MONSTEROUS JAHNTE? BUT YOU CAN'T. SO LONG AS I CONJURE THE PROTECTION OF THE MAGICIAN'S CIRCLE. I HAVE YOU TRAPPED IN A BUBBLE OF ALTERED TIME AND SPACE. AND THAT'S WHERE YOU'LL REMAIN SO LONG AS I RETAIN THE POWER OF MY CONVICTIONS.
WHERE CAME YOUUU BY THE LOSSST WORDSS SS... MASTER?


THAT I HAVE THEM IS ENOUGH! BEFORE YOU EARN THE RIGHT TO RETURN TO YOUR HELLISH NOTHINGNESS, HEAR WHY I HAVE CALLED YOU.

SPEAK TO POOR JAHNTE, THE MISFORTUNATE IMP, THE PITIFUL SLAVE WHO WISHES ONLY HIS FREEDOM. NRRR!

THIS WORLD! THIS WORLD IS GROWING CRUELER AND MORE DREAD WITH EACH PASSING DAY. IT IS MERCILESS, MALEVOLENT, FOR ALL THOSE INNOCENT. THE THING I TREASURE ABOVE ALL IS MOST INNOCENT OF ALL! MY DAUGHTER... ONLY A FEW MONTHS OLD. SHE WILL BE GENTLE AND GUILTLESS LIKE HER MOTHER. AND THE WORLD WILL BE AT ITS MOST EVIL WHEN SHE IS READY TO LIVE IN IT. SHE WILL NEED CONSTANT PROTECTION FROM ALL HARM. SHE MUST BE WATCHED OVER ALL THE DAYS OF HER LIFE.

WHHHHAT? THIS IS MY BIDDING? NOT TO BRING RICHES AND IMMORTALITY? TO BUT WATCH OVER AN INNOCENT FEMALE LIKE A GUARDIAN ANGELLLLL? WHHHAT MADNESSS IS THISSS?
THE MADNESS OF LOVE, GARGOYLE. A LOVE THAT WOULD BRAVE THE MONSTERS OF HELL. EVEN IF I SELL MY SOUL, LOVE MUST PROTECT MY DAUGHTER UNTIL THE END OF HER DAYS. CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT, JAHNTE? I WANT NOT MONEY, FAME, GREAT FORTUNE. I HAVE ANOTHER KIND OF GREED. MY CHILD MUST LIVE SAFELY AMONG EARTHLY HORRORS.

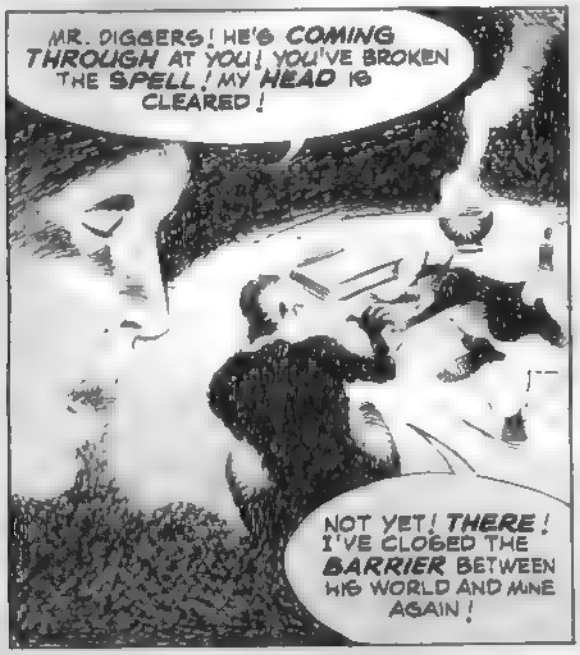
WWWHAT MORE HIDEOUS THING COULD I BE MADE TO DO? WITHHH THESE TWO HANDS, I WOULD BREAK OPEN YOUR SKULL AND EAT YOUR BRAINS!
DO YOU DENY TO MY BIDDING?
I SSSHALL HAVE MY REVENGE FOR THISSS INDIGNITY!

NOOOO! I MUST DO AS YOU SAY. BUT I SSSHALLLL HAVE YOU IN TORMENT FOR MAKING ME DO SSSO.
YOU CAN'T TAKE NO MORE OF THIS, GEROME! THEY'VE GOT TO STOP IT!

MR. DIGGER! PLEASE! YOU'RE KILLING MY COUSIN!

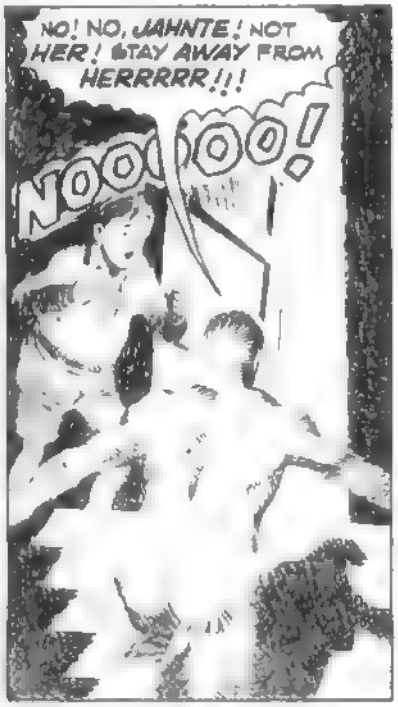
WHAT ??? HOW? WHO ARE YOU?
YARRHHAHAHA! BOYS! WATCHING YOU SIN, MASTER! SEEING IT ALLLL!

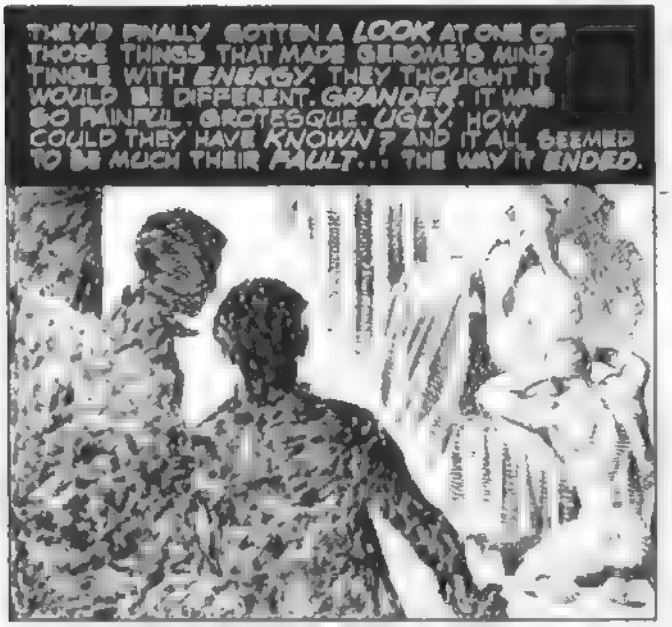
YOU! GET OUT OF HERE! YOU'RE IN GREAT DANGER!
AS ARE YOU, MASTER! YOU'VE LOST YOUR THOUGHT! THE DEFENSES ARE OPENED! I'LL HAVE YOUR GUTS NOW!


MR. DIGGERS! HE'S COMING THROUGH AT YOU! YOU'VE BROKEN THE SPELL! MY HEAD IS CLEARED!
NOT YET! THERE! I'VE CLOSED THE BARRIER BETWEEN HIS WORLD AND MINE AGAIN!

AAAAAAIIIIIEE! YOU'VE CUT OFF MY HANDSSSS!!!
AS THE TIME SPACE CONTINUUM BETWEN THE CONJUROR'S WORLD INSIDE THE PETAGRAM SNAPPED SHUT AGAINST THAT OF THE SLAVERING GARGOYLE, THAT WHICH WAS CAUGHT BETWEEN WAS AT FORFIET TO BOTH WORLDS.

YIIIIIIYEEEEE...





THERE WOULD BE OTHER UNKNOWN THINGS YET TO BE SENSED AND SOUGHT AFTER. THERE WOULD BE MORE DISAPPOINTMENTS, TOO. BUT NOW THEY HAD AN IDEA OF WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THIS SEARCH FOR THE UNKNOWN. PERHAPS THE MOONWEAVERS JUST MIGHT ONE DAY BE THE ONES TO SAVE THE ENTIRE WORLD. WHO KNOWS? BUT IT WOULDN'T BE TONIGHT... THEY REALIZED... PERHAPS TOMORROW FOR SURE.

END

THE COMIC BOOKS

By Joe Brancatelli

Here are some depressing facts for you to think about before you go back to reading your overpriced, underwritten Warren magazine:

When National Comics publisher and president Carmine Infantino was abruptly dismissed earlier this year, the corporate bigwigs at Warner Communications, the conglomerate which owns National, decided it needed new blood. After all, National was in its worst sales slump in many years and prospects were not good for immediate improvement.

Their chosen one for new blood as president, the key moneyman position? None other than Sol Harrison.

For those of you unfamiliar with ancient comic-book history, Harrison has literally been around since the beginning of time, having worked on the earliest comic books ever published. As far as anyone can tell, his first move after taking over as president was to telephone key National personnel and assure them that things would continue to be the same under his reign.

Over at Marvel Comics, Mr. One-Note himself, publisher Stan Lee, who has been with Marvel since 1939, went looking for a new editor after the occasionally talented Marv Wolfman's term ended Mr One-Note, who hasn't generated an original idea since he hit upon his now-cliched "superhero-with-problems" concept in 1961, decided he needed someone new to help Marvel out of its sales and quality decline

His choice for new boy wonder at the misnamed "House of Ideas"? Roy Thomas.

For those of you unfamiliar with recent comic-book history, Thomas served a totally forgettable stint as editor from 1972 to 1974, has spent the better portion of the last five years adapting other writers' stories, and once revealed that the only thing he was *ever* interested in writing was funny books.

Joe Brancatelli, a long-time comic-book and comic-art fan and reader, is a reporter and editor of Fairchild Publications, the nation's largest chain of business publications. He has also contributed to many of the nation's leading magazines and newspapers and wrote the comic-book entries for the recently-published WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF COMICS. His first book, SAD SONGS AND BAR TALK, a collection of his essays about street life in New York City, will be published next year.

Things being what they are, however, Thomas changed his mind and Mr. One-Note was left without an editor again. His second choice for new Marvel Messiah? Gerry Conway.

For those of you unfamiliar with talentless comic-book writers, the young Mr. Conway has made a career of bouncing back and forth between National and Marvel, impressing no one anywhere.

So much for new blood at Marvel.

Bill DuBay's resignation at Warren has left what many industry heavies believe is a rather large gap in the always shoestring-sized Warren organization. I am not privy to Warren corporate secrets despite this column, but, as of the first week of March, no editor had yet been chosen. The betting is, however, that the eventual successor to DuBay will be pulled from the already thin ranks of the comic-book business.

Now believe me, I'm all for tradition and recycling the same old troops —when it serves a purpose and when an industry can afford it. But the comic-book business is presently suffering through one *hell* of a sales and creative nosedive.

Sales haven't been as poor since Estes Kefauver and his Senatorial good ole boys were conducting their nationally televised hearing into alleged links between comics and crime back in the 1950s.

Creatively, the comic books, never quite the cultural font some would have us believe, are as stagnant as ever. It looks like we may be in for another round of 1940s superheroes or, worse still, another round of 1950s B.E.M.s from every corner of the galaxy. And it's hardly uplifting when the two most acclaimed titles of the year are Warren's THE SPIRIT and Marvel's HOWARD THE DUCK. That one is merely a series of reprints from the 1940s and the other is a badly-updated and inane version of Donald Duck does not bode well for the creative business.

Should you need some very hard facts and figures to convince you about the very hard times the comic-book industry has fallen upon of late, let me offer this little depressing tidbit of mathematics. According to the best calculations I could compile from Postal Service records, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) notices and a series of conversations with many of the nation's leading independent magazine distributors, comic-book sales are down about 30 per cent during the last six-to-12 months.

And they're getting worse.

"My records show comic sales down about 50 per cent, one half, since last July," said an executive of the nation's leading independent distributor of comic books.

His gloomy assessment of the comic-book business is shared by most of the independent distributors. They're unhappy with the comic-book business already—they don't make much money even when comics are selling. Most of them plainly indicate they're not about to keep concentrating on comic books if sales continue to drop.

And, dear fans, without the independent distributors, there are no comic books. None. Good-bye. Pack it in and blow away.

There are, of course, any number of reasons for the comic-book sales decline. The creative people aren't free to produce material in tune with the times, the distribution channels are stacked against the successful merchandising of comic books, and the economy is still being fickle with any low-priced high-volume item like comics.

More than anything, however, the decline in sales must be laid to the decline in quality of the books. Comic magazines simply aren't as well written and drawn as they have been. And that's not saying much—they were never all that good to begin with. What to do?

Short of junking the whole system and firing nine of every 10 people who purport to write and draw and edit comics as a profession—probably the most logical solution, by the way—not a whole lot.

But some things can be done, and, as this column progresses, I'll be presenting some ideas. I'll also be discussing some of comics weakest points, their most blatant shortcoming and I'll also be feeding you some information about the business most comic moguls would prefer you wouldn't know.

James Warren, the publisher and all-around big kahuna of Warren Publishing, has promised that this column will be an uncensored, open forum, so his operations will be getting the same scrutiny as Marvel or National or Gold Key or Charlton.

More than anything, however, this column should be a forum for you. The average reader who just happens to pick up the tab, and, in the long run, makes the final decisions.

So here's your chance to get involved with the business. Tell me what's on your mind and I'll do my best to convey it here along with everything else. The address is Joe Brancatelli, The Comic Books, c/o Warren Publishing Co., 145 East 32nd Street, New York, New York 10016

The opinions expressed on this page are exclusively those of Mr Brancatelli As such, they may not reflect the thinking of Warren Publishing Company's management or employees

Wolfer O'Connel

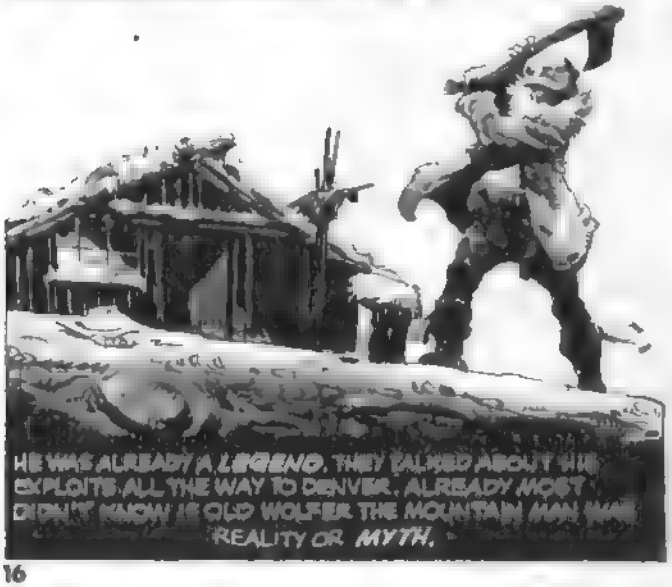
THEY CALLED IT "*THE HIGH LONESOME*" THOSE MOUNTAINS AND WORLDS UNKNOWN TO THE CIVILIZED CULTURES OF AMERICA, CIRCA *1799*. IT WAS WHERE SOCIETY WOULD LIKELY NEVER COME, NEVER COME TO SPOIL SOIL, USURP FROM GOD'S OWN SCHEME OF ORDER.

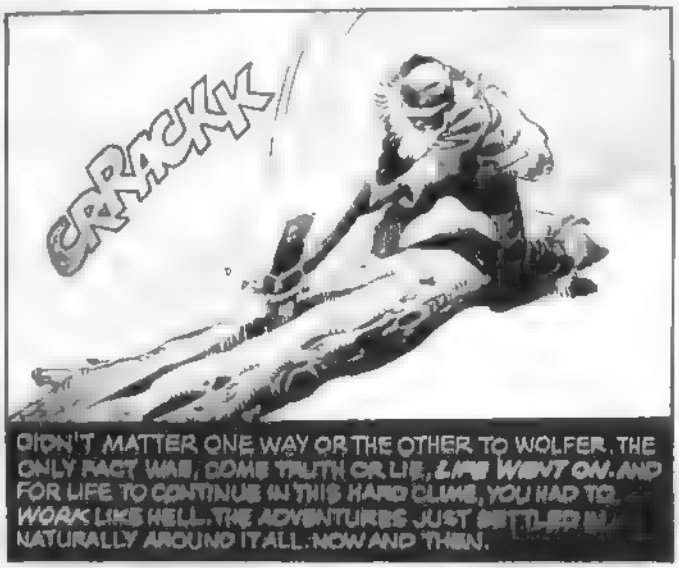
BUT THOSE LOFTY REALMS ABOVE THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS WERE MORE *THORN* THAN ROSE TO THOSE THAT KNEW HOW LIFE MAINTAINED ITSELF UP THERE. A LOT OF PEOPLE CAME THERE AND WENT AGAIN, SOON REALIZING IT COULD *NOT* BELONG TO THE GREED OF MANKIND.

THE GRAND SPLENDOR OF THAT COUNTRY WAS *UNCAPTURABLE*. NO MAN COULD LAY CLAIM TO IT ITS VASTNESS CONSUMED THEM SOON ENOUGH. THEY COULDN'T COME WITH THEIR MAPS AND CHARTS, THEIR CLAIMS AND BOUNDARIES. THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY YOU COULD COME TO COUNTRY THAT BIG ON YOUR *KNEES*, READY AND ABLE TO LEARN. TO LEARN ITS WAYS. TO BECOME PART OF IT. TO *BE* IT.

AND THAT'S HOW A FELLOW NAMED *WOLFER O'CONNEL* EARNED HIS RIGHT TO LIVE THERE. FOR FORTY-TWO YEARS, HE'D BEEN A CLINGING, CRUSTY OLD *WART* ON THE LIP OF NATURE, AS SHE SANG TO HIM HER...

HIGHSONG



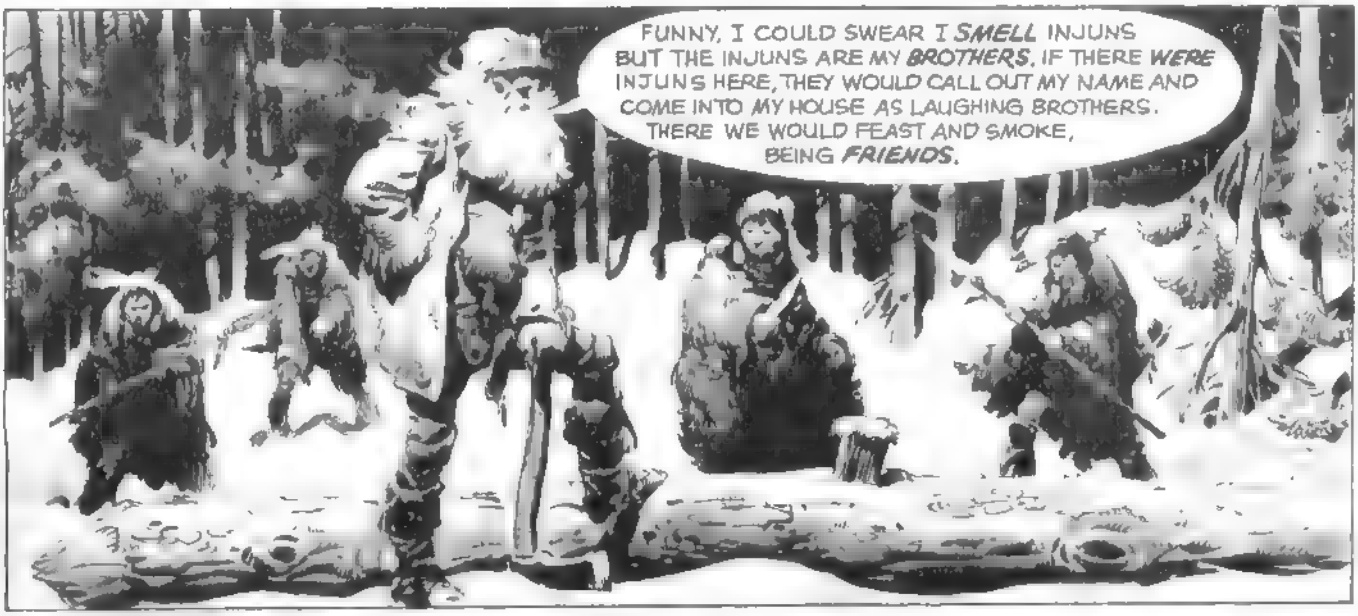


STORY: BUDD LEWIS/ART: LUIS BERMEJO

ONE MORE GOOD WHACK AND... HMM I SMELL COMPANY.

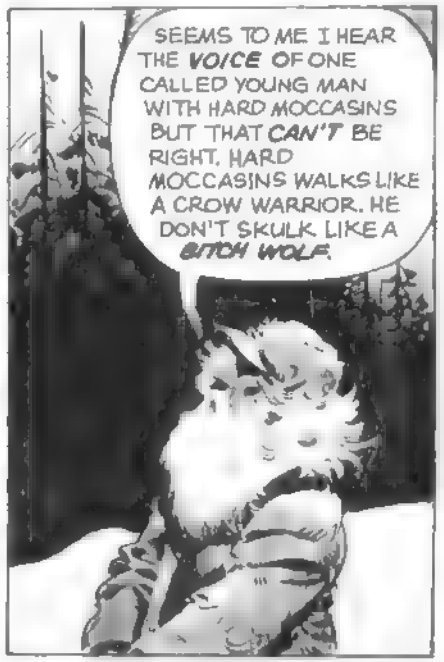
SMELLS LIKE WET MOCCASINS. RANCID BEAR FAT.. JMM HMMM. AND WAR PAINT.

WHO COMES TO THE LODGE OF WOLFER, THE INJUNS BROTHER ?


FUNNY, I COULD SWEAR I SMELL INJUNS BUT THE INJUNS ARE MY BROTHERS. IF THERE WERE INJUNS HERE, THEY WOULD CALL OUT MY NAME AND COME INTO MY HOUSE AS LAUGHING BROTHERS. THERE WE WOULD FEAST AND SMOKE, BEING FRIENDS.

BUT, I MUST BE WRONG. THERE CAN'T BE INJUNS AROUND HERE. I MUST SMELL CRITTERS. CUZ ONLY CRITTERS STEAL UP TO A MAN'S HOUSE LIKE SHADOWS OF SHAME
DANG IT! I WAS SURE LOOKIN' FORWARD TO A GOOD VISIT WITH SOME OF MY BROTHERS, THE PROUD CROW.

YOU ARE WRONG, BROTHER CALLED WOLFER. IT IS I, YOUNG MAN WITH HARD MOCCASINS. DO NOT SHAME US FOR OUR WAY.


SEEMS TO ME I HEAR THE VOICE OF ONE CALLED YOUNG MAN WITH HARD MOCCASINS BUT THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT. HARD MOCCASINS WALKS LIKE A CROW WARRIOR. HE DON'T SKULK LIKE A BITCH WOLF.

I WILL **NOT** BE **SHAMED** BY YOU, WOLFER. LOOK UPON MY **FACE** AS I SPEAK TO YOU.

CAIN'T HEAR A **WORD** HARD MOCCASINS IS SAYIN'. MUST ONLY BE THE WIND.

HARD MOCCASINS WOULD SPEAK GOOD AND FRIENDLY WORDS TO OLD WOLFER. WELL, ON WITH MY **WORK**.

GUESS I'LL JUST TAKE MY RIFLE AND SCARE UP SOME SUPPER NO NEED TO STAND AROUND HERE LISTENIN' TO THE **WIND**.

DO NOT **MOCK** ME ANY FURTHER, WHITE MAN. I HAVE COME TO **KILL** YOU THIS DAY.

LEAVE THE RIFLE **ALONE**, OLD MAN!

CAIHOCKK

WHAT THE HELL IS GOT **WRONG** WITH YOU, INJUN? YOU AIMING TO HAVE MY **HAIR**? YOU OUGHTA KNOW TAKIN' A CRAZY MAN'S HAIR 'ROUSES **EVIL SPIRITS**!

YOU **ARE** CRAZY OLD MAN. LIKE THE **WOLVES** YOU HUNT. BUT CRAZY WITH **WILE**. EVIL SPIRITS HAVE **ALREADY** BEEN AROUSED. AND THE **WHITE MEN** HAVE BROUGHT EVIL AMONG THE CROW.

NOW **ALL** WHITE MEN MUST **DIE**, EVEN YOU!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTIN' AT, YOU RED FOOL, BUT I AIN'T GOT **NOTHING** TO DO WITH **SPIRITS** AND **EVIL DOINGS**!

WELL, IF YOU'RE AIMIN' TO **KILL** ME, AND DEAD SET ON IT, THE LEAST YOU CAN DO IS GRANT ME A **LAST REQUEST**!

I'M AN OLD MAN. DEATH IS MY FRIEND. EVEN NOW I WAS SPLITTIN' THAT LOG, YONDER, TO HOLLOW OUT MYSELF A **COFFIN**.

YOU **SAY**, ONE CALLED WOLFER.

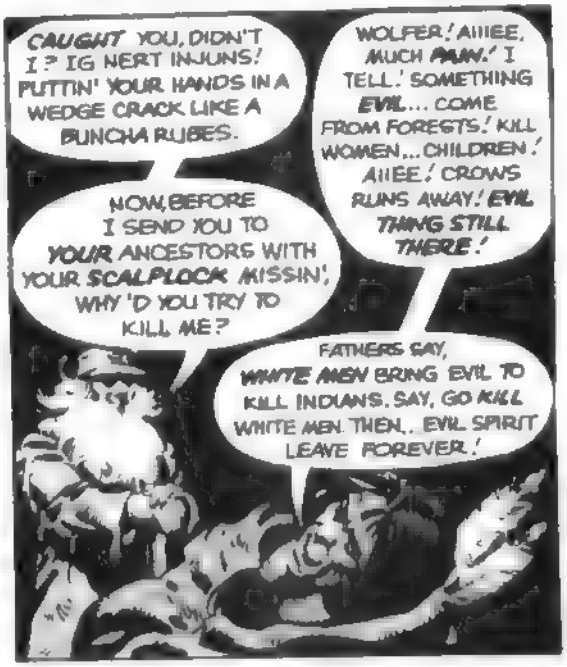
LET ME FINISH IT. SO'S I CAN GO TO **MY ANCESTORS** ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOMS OF MY TRIBE.

JEST HELP ME SPLIT THAT RAIL AND HELP ME HOLLOW IT OUT SO'S YOU'LL HAVE SOME PLACE TO DUMP MY **POOR OLD BUTCHERED BODY**?

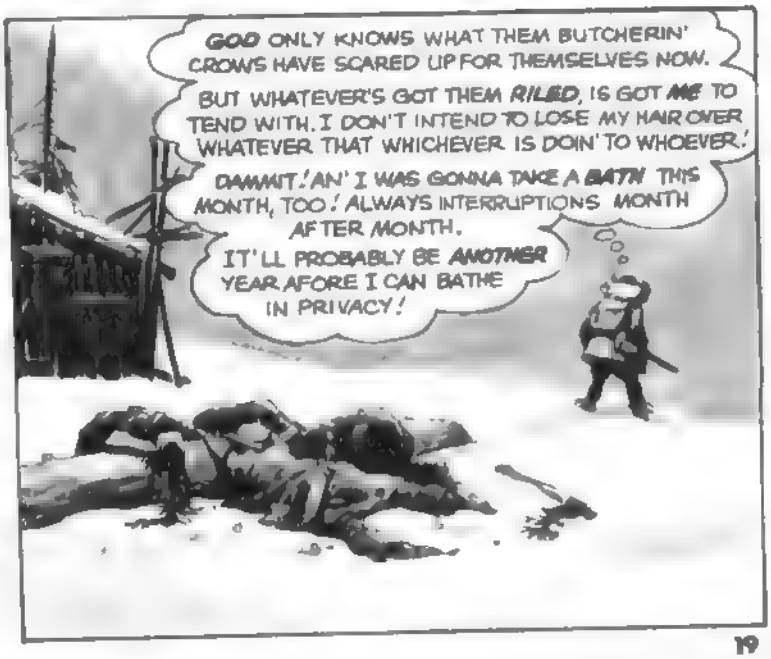
ALRIGHT NOW, YOU BOYS KNOW WHAT TO DO. WHEN I POUND THIS DRIVIN' WEDGE DOWN INTO THIS H'YERE LOG, FULL WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT AND WE'LL SPLIT THE LOG CLEAN IN HALF.
YOU READY NOW? GET READY TO PULL HARD AS I STRIKE THE WEDGE. ONE, TWO...

BUT... INSTEAD OF DRIVING THE WEDGE DEEPER DOWN INTO THE LOG, WOLFER STRUCK THE WEDGE, KNOCKING IT OUT OF THE LOG ALTOGETHER. THE WEDGE FLEW FROM THE CRACK IN THE LOG AND...
IT'S AN OLD TRICK, BOYS, BUT A GOOD 'UN!
KLUNKK

AIIIRRRREEEE
YEE
YEAAAEE
I'M SURPRISED YOU MURDERIN' SAVAGES DIDN'T CATCH ON TO THAT TRICK.
GO AHEAD, WIGGLE AND SQUIRM. YOU'RE CAUGHT FAST, LIKE FOUR POLECATS WITH THEIR TAILS IN A CRACK.


CAUGHT YOU, DIDN'T I? IG NERT INJUNS! PUTTIN' YOUR HANDS IN A WEDGE CRACK LIKE A BUNCHA RUBES.
WOLFER! AIIIEE, MUCH PAIN! I TELL! SOMETHING EVIL... COME FROM FORESTS! KILL WOMEN... CHILDREN! AIIEE! CROWS RUNS AWAY! EVIL THING STILL THERE!
NOW, BEFORE I SEND YOU TO YOUR ANCESTORS WITH YOUR SCALPLOCK MISSIN', WHY 'D YOU TRY TO KILL ME?
FATHERS SAY, WHITE MEN BRING EVIL TO KILL INDIANS. SAY, GO KILL WHITE MEN THEN... EVIL SPIRIT LEAVE FOREVER!

I'LL GO SEE THIS FOR M'SELF! AND THIS S FOR TRYING TO BUSHWHACK AN OLD MAN.
KUCHOCK
AIIEE... GUHKKHHH


GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT THEM BUTCHERIN' CROWS HAVE SCARED UP FOR THEMSELVES NOW.
BUT WHATEVER'S GOT THEM RILED, IS GOT ME TO TEND WITH. I DON'T INTEND TO LOSE MY HAIR OVER WHATEVER THAT WHICHEVER IS DOIN' TO WHOEVER!
DAMMIT! AN' I WAS GONNA TAKE A BATH THIS MONTH, TOO! ALWAYS INTERRUPTIONS MONTH AFTER MONTH.
IT'LL PROBABLY BE ANOTHER YEAR AFORE I CAN BATHE IN PRIVACY!

THE CROW HAD OBVIOUSLY *REASONED* THAT *THEIR* MISFORTUNES WERE THE MAKING OF THE WHITE MEN THEREABOUTS.

THEY'D TRIED TO KILL WOLPER BEFORE, BUT BY PURE LUCK AND A LITTLE GUILE, HE HAD ESCAPED THE FIRST ATTACK, AND WOLPER KNEW, SOONER OR LATER, IN AN ATTEMPT TO RID THEMSELVES OF THEIR *EVIL SPIRIT*, THEY'D *GET TO HIM*. SO, IT WAS TO HIS BENEFIT TO FIND OUT *WHAT* THE EVIL SPIRIT WAS.

SOMETHIN' DONE GOT ME!!!
MYARRRROWLL

I DON'T WHAT I GOT HERE, BUT I BET IT'S WHAT ALL THE HOORAH IS ABOUT.

WHAT SORT OF...? PART BEAR, PART WOLF, PART WILOMAN! AIN'T NEVER SEE'D THE LIKE OF THIS'N BEFORE! GOD!

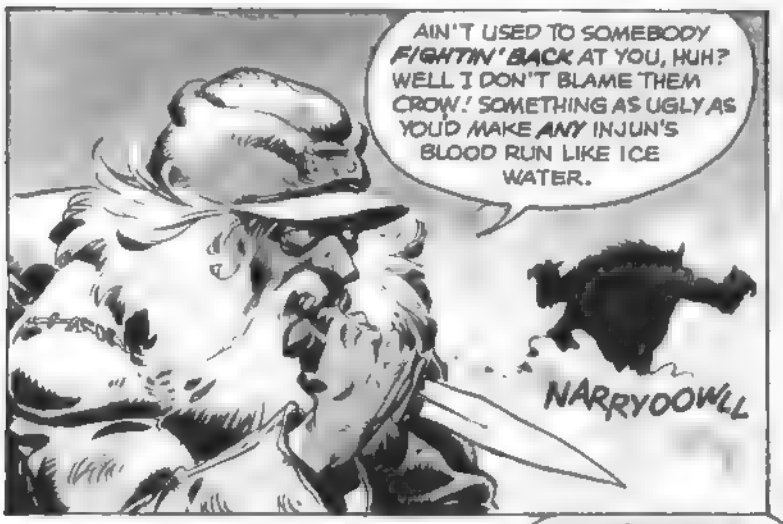
COME GET IT, YOU UGLY VARMINT! UGGNNNH!
YEEOOWRR
CHUKK
SNAP

BROKE GRIZZLY GRIN'S BLADE OFF CLEAN! GOT TO GET MY OWN KILLIN' KNIFE!
NRRRRAR NRR

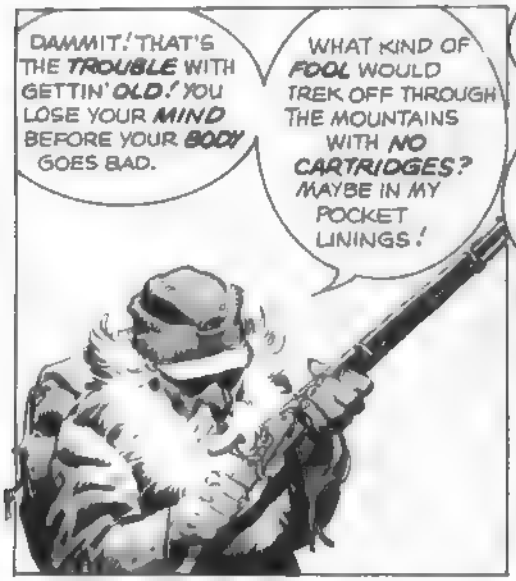
GEDDOFF ME, YOU SLOBBERIN' BASTARD!
ROOOOO

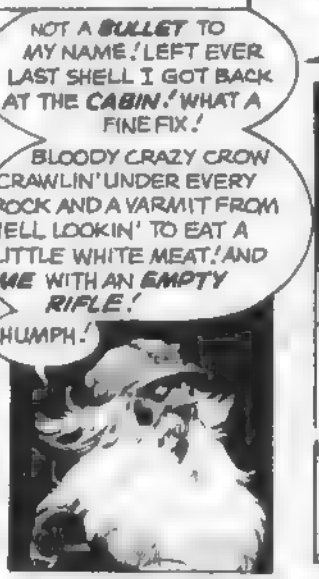
TRY IT WITH MY INJUN KILLIN' KNIFE, Y'PUKE!

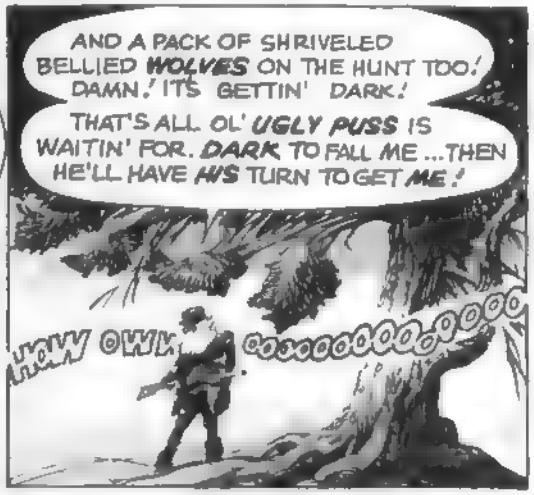
WITH A HEAD OF HAIR LIKE THAT, IT'S A WONDER YOU'VE STILL GOT IT ATTACHED TO YOUR HEAD IN CROW COUNTRY! GET BACK!!!
YIIIIIIIIIIIII!


AIN'T USED TO SOMEBODY FIGHTIN' BACK AT YOU, HUH? WELL I DON'T BLAME THEM CROW! SOMETHING AS UGLY AS YOU'D MAKE ANY INJUN'S BLOOD RUN LIKE ICE WATER.
NARRYOOWLL

JEST WISH I COULDA GOT THAT CRITTER DOWN THE SIGHTS OF MY OLD HAWKEN 50! OH, JESOOS!


DAMMIT! THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH GETTIN' OLD! YOU LOSE YOUR MIND BEFORE YOUR BODY GOES BAD.
WHAT KIND OF FOOL WOULD TREK OFF THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS WITH NO CARTRIDGES? MAYBE IN MY POCKET LININGS!


NOT A BULLET TO MY NAME! LEFT EVER LAST SHELL I GOT BACK AT THE CABIN! WHAT A FINE FIX!
BLOODY CRAZY CROW CRAWLIN' UNDER EVERY ROCK AND A VARMIT FROM HELL LOOKIN' TO EAT A LITTLE WHITE MEAT! AND ME WITH AN EMPTY RIFLE!
HUMPH!


AND A PACK OF SHRIVELED BELLIED WOLVES ON THE HUNT TOO! DAMN! IT'S GETTIN' DARK!
THAT'S ALL OL' UGLY PUSS IS WAITIN' FOR. DARK TO FALL ME ...THEN HE'LL HAVE HIS TURN TO GET ME!
OWWW OWW

UM HMM. IT'S A LONG SHOT, BUT IT'S THE ONLIEST SHOT I GOT!
AND WOLFER O'CONNEL CLIMBED PRECARIOUSLY INTO THE MIDDLE OF A HOWLING PACK OF WINTER STARVED WOLVES.

OWWWOOOOO WOOOO
KEEP ON HOWLING, OL BROTHER WOLF!
I'M A-COMIN!

I KNOW WHERE YOU CAN EAT, BOYS! GNNRRRRRR!
AYRRRRR
YRRRR
NRRRRR
THE STARTLED WOLVES SNARLED...BACKED OFF TEMPORARILY...

AND THE CRAZY OLD TRAPPER SPRINTED RIGHT THROUGH THEM...

YARK YAR YAR YRARRRRR

YAH HAHEHAHEHA! COME AND GET IT BOYS! SOUP'S ON!

...LEADING THE PACK PAST THE DESERTED CROW VILLAGE!

HEY! CRITTER! WE'RE HAVING COMPANY TO SUPPER TONIGHT!

EAT HEARTY, BOYS! TIME FOR THE LAW OF SURVIVAL! THE BIG 'UNS EAT THE LITTLE 'UNS!

LOVE TO STAY, BUT I GOT MULLIGAN STEW WAITIN' AT HOME. YAHOOOO!

ARROOOOO

YARRLLL

OLD WOLFER HADN'T LIVED ALONE UP THERE ALL THOSE YEARS JUST TO BE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING AS CRAZY AS A STALKING FREAK OF NATURE AND A PACK OF RAVAGING WOLVES. HE QUICKLY DECIDED TO LET THEM WORK IT ALL OUT BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

ARROOOYARRR

YARRRRRRR

YARK

SO YOU BOYS COULDN'T MAKE UP YER MINDS AS TO WHO HAD THE RIGHT TO DO WHAT, WITH WHICH AND TO WHO?

WELL, SO MUCH FOR EVIL SPIRITS, NOW MAYBE THINGS CAN GIT BACK TO NORMAL AROUND HERE ONCE THEM CRAZY CROWS SIMMER DOWN.

MEN LIKE WOLFER O'CONNEL WEREN'T CONCERNED WITH EXPLANATIONS. THEY JUST TOOK WHAT CAME AND DEALT WITH IT AS THEY COULD. THERE WASN'T TIME ENOUGH TO WASTE PONDERING OVER STRANGE CRITTERS THAT ROAM THE ROCK LONESOME. FIRST, THERE WAS WORK TO BE DONE, LIFE ALWAYS WENT ON, AND THE ADVENTURES JUST SETTLED IN NATURALLY AROUND IT ALL. NOW AND THEN.

END

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A **GOD**. AND HE, OR SHE, (DEPENDING ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW) WAS AWFULLY BIG ON **OMNIPOTENCE**, BUT HAD THE IMAGINATION OF A RETARDED MONGOOSE.

FOR A LONG TIME, GOD LIVED IN A LIMITLESS, BARREN WHITE VOID, WHICH WAS OKAY EXCEPT THERE WAS NEVER ANYTHING TO **DO**. AND BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING BUT WHITENESS EVERYWHERE, EVEN WHERE THE FLOOR SHOULD HAVE BEEN, IT MADE **WALKING** A BIT PRECARIOUS.

GOD NEVER KNEW WHAT WAS HOLDING HIM UP, AND WAS AFRAID TO ASK FOR FEAR THAT THE ANSWER WOULD FIND HIM TUMBLING ENDLESSLY THROUGH BARREN WHITE **SPACE**.

AFTER A TIME, GOD GOT **BORED** WITH BEING SURROUNDED BY ALL THAT WHITE NOTHINGNESS, AND THOUGHT A LITTLE CONTRASTING COLOR MIGHT BE NICE. WITH A SNAP OF HIS FINGERS, THE WHITENESS TURNED INTO INSTANT **BLACKNESS**...AND GOD FOUND HIMSELF GROPING ABOUT IN THE DARK.

THE STRIKE FORCE IS **READY**, CHIEF!

IN A MOMENT OF BLIND, FEAR-OF-THE-DARK **PANIC**, GOD SHOUTED, "LET THERE BE **LIGHT!**" AND INSTANTLY TRILLIONS OF BRIGHT SUNS ILLUMINATED THE BLACK VOID, AND GOD CEASED TO BE AFRAID OF THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT!

GOOD! LET'S GET DOWN ON THAT **PLANET**...

UPON BEEING THE COUNTLESS SUNS, GOD SAID, "OUTTASITE!" AND SET OUT TO FINISH THE INTERIOR DECORATING JOB HE HAD BEGUN ON THE UNIVERSE. SEVEN DAYS AND SIX SEVERE HEADACHES LATER, GOD SAT BACK **FULFILLED**...KNOWING THAT HE HAD BUT ONE MORE CREATIVE EFFORT BEFORE HIS TASK WAS COMPLETE.

FOR SOME MYSTERIOUS REASON, GOD FELT **COMPELLED** TO CONSTRUCT A BEING IN HIS OWN IMAGE, NOT REALIZING THAT HE WAS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR HEADACHE NUMBER SEVEN.

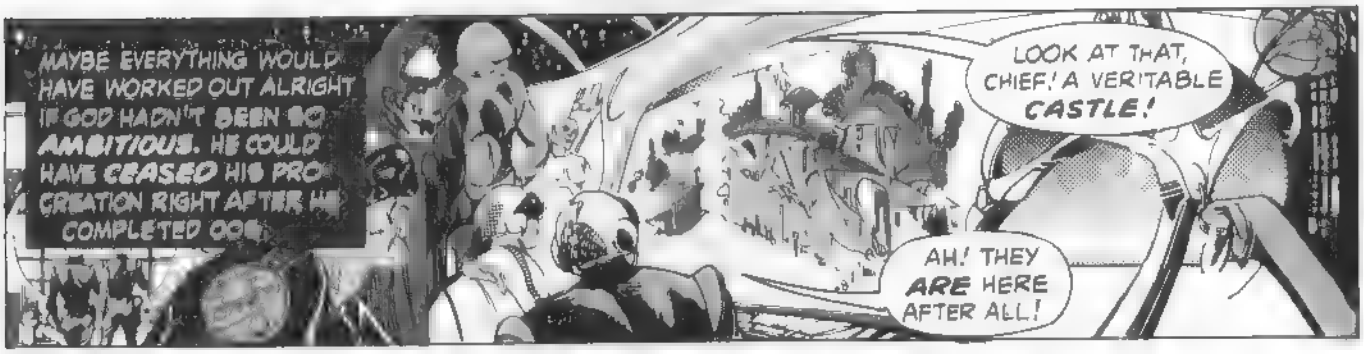
AGAIN, HE SNAPPED HIS FINGERS, SHOUTED THE MAGIC WORD, AND SHAZAM! INSTANTLY A BOLT OF LIGHTNING, ROUGHLY THE SHAPE OF A PREGNANT STORK, **STREAKED** THROUGH THE GALAXIES CARRYING AN ODD LITTLE BUNDLE OF JOY.

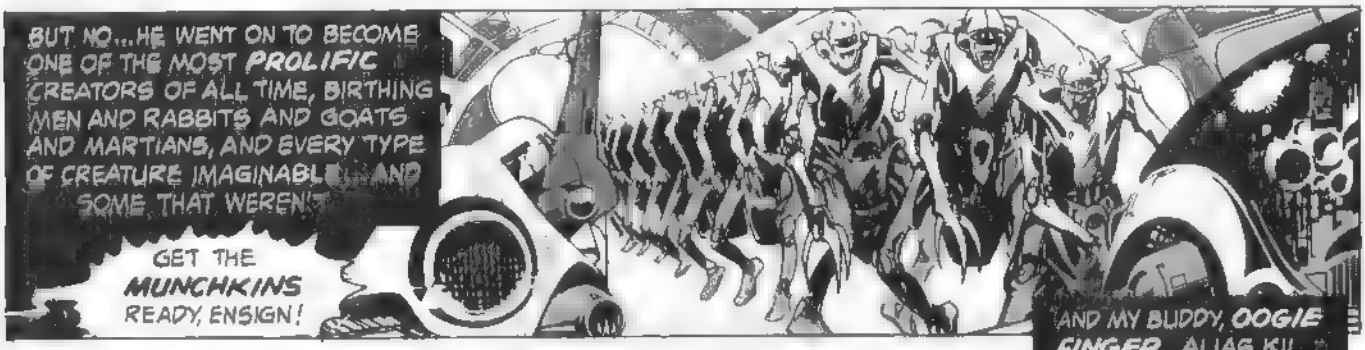
THE LIGHTNING THUNDERED ONTO AN OBSCURE, BARREN PLANET JUST TO THE LEFT OF TRAFALMADORE, AND THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE, THE CRY OF THE **FIRST LIVING BEING** COULD BE HEARD.

...AND COMMENCE THE **ASSAULT!**

AND GOD CALLED HIS FIRSTBORN, **KIL GORE TROWT!**

AND **THAT**, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, IS THE DUBIOUS GOSPEL ACCORDING TO **KIL GORE TROWT**, ALIAS **OOGIE FINGER**, ONE OF GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN **SONS!**





OOGIE & the SCROUNGERS

STORY: BILL DuBAY/ART: ESTEBAN MAROTO

PRUNELLA McSHATTERS WAS A PRETTY, BUT SOMEWHAT INTELLECTUALLY SAGGING YOUNG THING; NOT THE STUFF OF WHICH YOUR USUAL GOD IS MADE.

SHE WAS WITH ME, LO THOSE MANY MONTHS AGO, WHEN WE WERE ABANDONED ON THIS CELESTIAL PARADISE WITH THE NUTSY GODLING, KIL GORE.*

*SEE EERIE #70 "OOGIE AND THE JUNKERS!"

FOR AWHILE, PRUNELLA, OOGIE AND MYSELF SHARED THE GREATEST OF TIMES, ENACTING THE EXPLOITS OF OUR VIDEO HEROES, BUCK BLASTER AND THE BUSTITOUS THELMA STARBUST.

BUT PRUNIE EVENTUALLY GREW BORED AND ASPIRED TO GREATER THINGS. SHE WANTED TO BE A GOD LIKE KIL GORE/OOGIE...AND OUR BENEVOLENT DIETY IN A FIT OF MOMENTARY INSANITY GRANTED THAT WISH!

SO NOW, INSTEAD OF BEING MAROONED IN PARADISE WITH ONE INJUDICIOUS POTENTATE AT MY SIDE, I HAD TWO GODLY COMPANIONS...

...AND ALMOST NO HOPE OF EVER BEING RESCUED AND RETURNED TO CIVILIZATION...

T-THAT FLOOD... OUT OF NOWHERE! IT'S CLOGGING THE MUNCHKINS... RUSTING THEM IN THEIR TRACKS!

...OR SO I THOUGHT! BUT THEN, I DIDN'T KNOW OF THE UNITER WORLD'S STARSHIP THAT CIRCLED THE PLANET IN SEARCH OF US!

PRUNIE WAS FIRST TO SEE THE SHIP AND IT'S RESCUE UNIT...AND SHE, NATURALLY ENOUGH, MISTOOK THEM FOR INVADERS!

AH HA! FEMALE SUPREMACY TRIUMPHS AGAIN! THAT OUGHT TO TEACH THEM TO GO MESSIN' WITH MS. GOD!

BUT THEN, PRUNIE ALWAYS WAS *OBSTINATE* IN HER IGNORANCE. SO WERE ALL OF THE WOMEN I HAD EVER KNOWN FOR THAT MATTER.

AND IT SEEMED THE *PRETTIER* THEY WERE, THE MORE THEY HAD TO FLEX THEIR MENIAL MENTAL MUSCLES TO "PUT MEN IN THEIR PLACE!"

THAT DOWNPOUR WAS NO *ACCIDENT*, CHIEF. IT WAS AN OUT-RIGHT ATTACK ON OUR FORCES.

HAD OOGIE AND I *KNOWN* ABOUT THE RESCUE SHIP, WE WOULD HAVE WELCOMED IT WITH OPEN ARMS...OR TENTACLES, IN OOG'S CASE. BUT WE WERE ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE PLANET, ENGAGED IN THE ADVENTURE OF THE *BENIGIDAL AARDVARK!*

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT, ENSIGN. WE'D BETTER *PULL BACK* UNTIL WE CAN ASCERTAIN WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST.

SIR! I'M PICKING UP AN *IMAGE* FROM THE PLANET...!

IT MUST BE THE *GIRL*, CHIEF... MISS *McSHATTERS!*

BUT WHAT'S SHE *DOING?* SHE SEEMS TO BE IN A *DAZE*...AS IF SHE WERE CONCENTRATING--!

SIR! LOOK! WE'RE UNDER *SEIGE* AGAIN!

I-IT'S COMING *AT* US! B-BUT WHAT *IS* IT? I'VE NEVER SEEN ANY-THING LIKE IT!

I HAVE, SIR...O-ON THE *BUCK BLASTER VIDEO HOUR!*

SPEAK UP, SON...WHAT IS THE THING?

OH *NO*, ENSIGN...YOU DON'T *MEAN--?*

I-IT'S A GIANT *STINK BOMB*, SIR... FILLED WITH... WITH--!

YES, SIR...IT'S A VERITABLE *CESSPOOL!*

GET US THE HELL *OUT* OF HERE, BOY!

IT WASN'T UNTIL OOG AND I **RETURNED** FOR THE EVENING THAT WE LEARNED OF THE RESCUE SHIP'S **PRESENCE**. OOG CLIMBED INTO HIS JAR, SWITCHED ON HIS VIDEO MONITOR AND SAT BACK FOR AN EVENING OF RERUNS...!

BUT THE TUBE WAS JAMMED WITH SPACIAL INTERFERENCE...AND INSTANTLY OOG KNEW THE PRESENCE OF A **STAR SHIP** WAS BREAKING UP THE VIDEO WAVES.

UH...DON'T GET **EXCITED**, LEROY, BUT I THINK WE'VE GOT **VISITORS!**

EXCITED? I COULD SCARCELY CONTAIN MY **JUBILATION!** IT WASN'T THAT I **DISLIKED** BEING MAROONED ON A PLANET WITH OOG AND PRUNIE - I HAD GROWN TO LOVE THEM BOTH DEARLY.

I'LL BE **RIGHT BACK,** OOG!

BUT LET'S FACE IT...ONE CAN ONLY TAKE SO MUCH OF BUCK BLASTER AND GOD! FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, I YEARNED FOR THE SANITY OF **REAL PEOPLE!**

HUMANS! I CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE IT!

THE SHUTTLE SHIP OOG HAD **CREATED** FOR ME HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH JUICE TO TAKE ME TO THE FRINGE OF THE PLANET'S **ATMOSPHERE!**

BUT WHY WOULD THEY COME BACK FOR US **NOW?**

MUCH BEYOND **THAT,** I KNEW, AND OOGIE'S POWERFUL INFLUENCE WOULD **FADE**...AND I'D FIND MYSELF STEERING **EMPTY AIR!**

IT'S AN **EARTH SHIP,** ALRIGHT... DEAD AHEAD!

COMMANDER, A CRAFT IS APPROACHING.
IT'S NOT ANOTHER STINK BOMB, IS IT?
I DON'T THINK SO, SIR!
LET IT DOCK, BUT BRING ME THE PILOT!

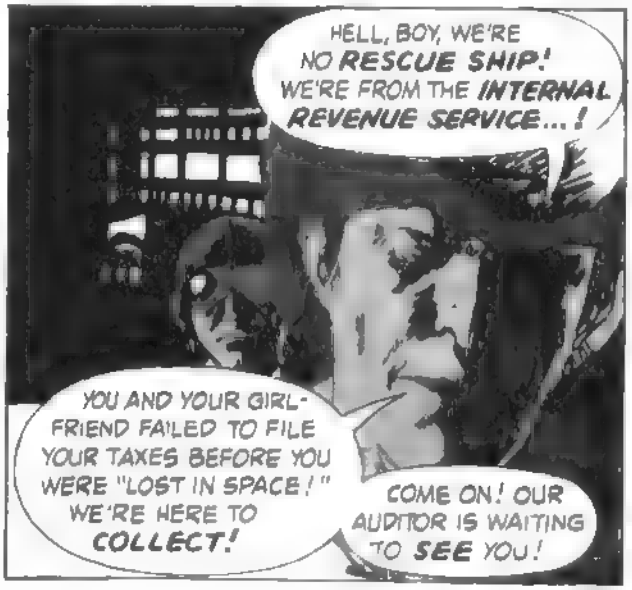
C-COMMANDER... YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS...!
WHAT IS IT NOW, ENSIGN?

T-THE PILOT, SIR...
...H-HE'S A DEAD RINGER FOR... FOR. .

...BUCK BLASTER!
CONFOUND IT, MAN, WHAT IS THIS BUCK BLASTER KICK YOU'RE ON?

LEROY BAGGS, AT YOUR SERVICE, SIR!
DAMN IT, TROOPER, WE'RE NOT THE GESTAPO! AT EASE!
WE'VE BEEN SENT ALL THIS WAY TO GET YOU, BOY!

I APPRECIATE THAT, SIR... PRUNIE AND I BOTH!
I DIDN'T SAY WE CAME HERE TO RESCUE YOU, SON...! I SAID WE CAME TO GET YOU!
I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENTIATION?


HELL, BOY, WE'RE NO RESCUE SHIP! WE'RE FROM THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE...!
YOU AND YOUR GIRL-FRIEND FAILED TO FILE YOUR TAXES BEFORE YOU WERE "LOST IN SPACE!" WE'RE HERE TO COLLECT!
COME ON! OUR AUDITOR IS WAITING TO SEE YOU!

YOU...YOU CAME TO THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE JUST TO COLLECT **TAXES?**

SURELY, MR. BAGGS, YOU WEREN'T HOPING TO **CHEAT** THE IRS BY SIMPLY GETTING YOURSELF MAROONED ON AN UNCHARTED PLANET?

I...I--!

LEROY...MAY I CALL YOU LEROY? DON'T YOU REALIZE HOW **IMPORTANT** IT IS FOR EVERY CITIZEN TO DO HIS SHARE TO UPHOLD DEMOCRACY?

AND DEMOCRACY IS **EXPENSIVE** THESE DAYS, LEROY!

THAT'S WHY WE'RE AFTER YOUR **BACK TAXES...**

...AS WELL AS THE TAXES YOU OWE SINCE BEING **ABANDONED** ON THIS PLANET!

B-BUT HOW CAN WE OWE **TAXES--?**

AND I'M CERTAIN YOU'VE PAID NO **PROPERTY** TAXES, **BUILDING** TAXES OR **FEDERAL ORDINANCE TAXES!**

COME, COME, LEROY! WE'VE SEEN THE **MANSION** YOU CALL YOUR HOME. YOU CAN'T HAVE BUILT THAT BY SELLING PENCILS ON THE CORNER ASTEROID.

BUT **OOGIE...** OUR RESIDENT GOD... **BUILT** THAT HOUSE FOR US. HE--!

DON'T BE **DIFFICULT,** LEROY! WE HAVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH THOSE WHO HOLD OUT ON THE IRS, Y'KNOW!

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR METAL **MANHOOD MASHERS?** WE CALL THEM **MUNCHKINS?**

THOSE **NUTCRACKERS** WEREN'T MADE FOR WALNUTS, Y'KNOW!

B-BUT HOW CAN WE PAY **TAXES...?** WE HAVE NO CURRENCY!

N-NO COIN-OF-THE-REALM? OH, MY BOY, YOU'RE IN WORSE TROUBLE THAN YOU CAN **IMAGINE!**

CHIEF...ANOTHER **SHIP** IS APPROACHING!

.S IT--?

NO SIR, IT'S **NOT** A STINK BOMB!

S-SIR... THE **PILOT** OF THAT LATEST SHIP...!

YES, ENSIGN? WHAT IS IT **NOW**?

SHE... SHE **LOOKS LIKE**--!

DON'T **TELL** ME, ENSIGN... SOMEONE OUT OF THE **BUCK BLASTER SHOW!** RIGHT?

N-NO, SIR. SOMEONE WHO **USED** TO BE ON THE SHOW...!

ENSIGN, I WANT YOU TO LAY OFF THE TUBE FOR AWHILE! THIS **BUCK BLASTER** IS AFFECTING YOUR MIND!

WELL, **MISS McSHATTERS!** WHAT AN UNEXPECTED **SURPRISE!**

YOU'RE JUST IN TIME TO HELP **LEROY** WITH YOUR TAX FORMS... HE SEEMS TO BE HAVING A BIT OF TROUBLE EXPLAINING YOUR **INCOME** THESE PAST FEW MONTHS.

INCOME? YOU MEAN **MONEY**?

ER.. THAT'S **USUALLY** WHAT IT MEANS, MISS McSHATTERS!

CALL ME **GOD!**

PARDON.?

MS. GOD! I PREFER IT NOW THAT I'M **OMNIPOTENT!**

ER... AHEM... YES... UH...

...WELL NOW.. LEROY CLAIMS YOU'VE BEEN MORE OR LESS **EMPLOYED** BY A CERTAIN MR. **TROWT!** IS THAT SO?

LEROY IS! **I'M** KINDA MY OWN BOSS, Y'KNOW!

WHY JUST THIS MORNING I COMPLETED **ROME**... DISPROVING THAT OLD ADAGE!

R-ROME?

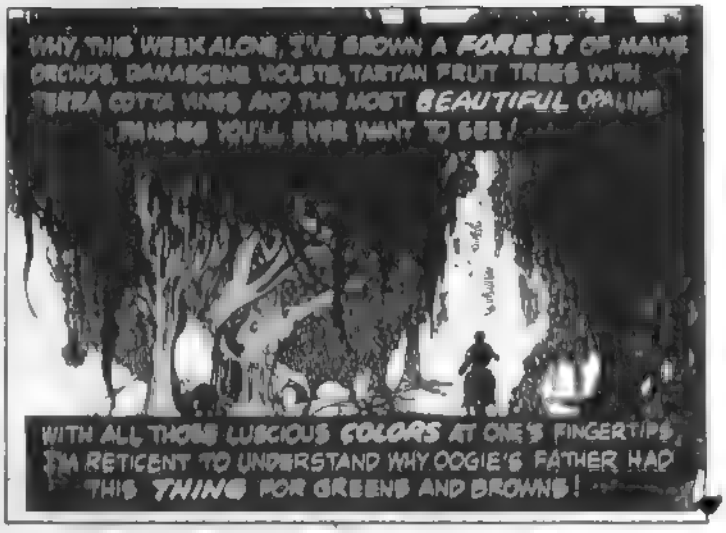
OH, I'M SORRY... SOMETIMES I **FORGET** THAT MERE MEN DON'T KNOW ANYTHING!

LET ME START AT THE BEGINNING... I GUESS IT ALL BEGAN THE DAY I ASKED OOGIE TO TRANSFORM ME INTO A **GOD!**

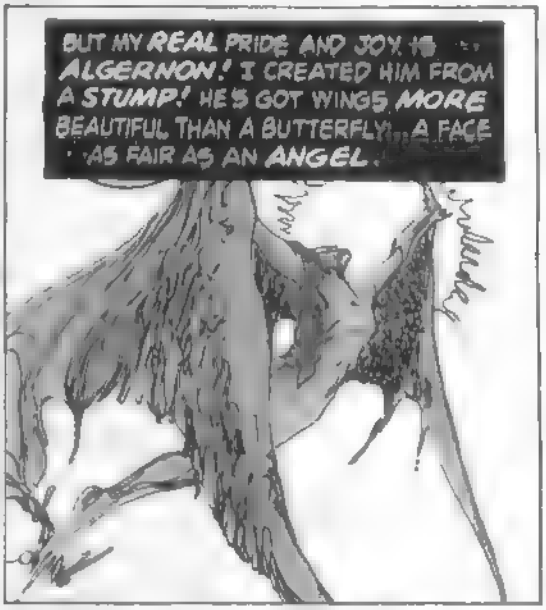
HE HEDGED AND STAMMERED AND LOOKED FOR AN ESCAPE CLAUSE IN HIS DEITETIC MANUAL... BUT COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING DENYING WOMEN POTENSTATIC RIGHTS!

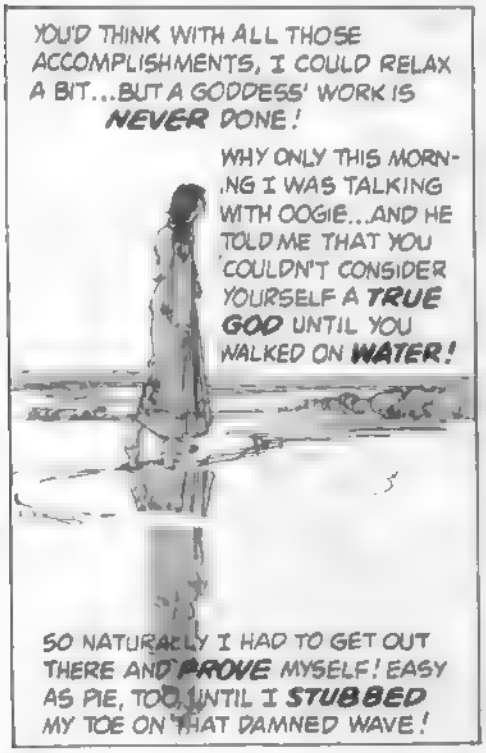
RELUCTANTLY, HE **ZAPPED** ME WITH A LIGHTNING BOLT! WELL, LET ME TELL YOU... I THOUGHT I'D **DIE**... BUT INSTANTLY I HEARD ORGAN MUSIC, SAW MY HALO, AND KNEW I'D **ARRIVED!**

EVER SINCE, I'VE BEEN EMPLOYED AS SORT OF THE PLANET EXTERIOR DECORATOR.
YOU SIMPLY WOULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT I'VE DONE TO ENHANCE THAT DRAB LITTLE ROCK!


WHY, THIS WEEK ALONE, I'VE GROWN A FOREST OF MAUVE ORCHIDS, DAMASCENE VIOLETS, TARTAN FRUIT TREES WITH TERRA COTTA VINES AND THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OPALINE THINGS YOU'LL EVER WANT TO SEE!
WITH ALL THOSE LUSCIOUS COLORS AT ONE'S FINGERTIPS, I'M RETICENT TO UNDERSTAND WHY OOGIE'S FATHER HAD THIS THING FOR GREENS AND BROWNS!

ANYWAY... BESIDE MY FOREST, I'VE BUILT AN ENTIRE VILLA OF EPICURIAN DELIGHTS! I'VE A TOWER OF MARINATED ARTICHOKE HEARTS, A BANANA CREAM BUNGALOW, A CHERRY STRUDEL CHATEAU AND A DUPLEX OF POTATOES AU GRATIN!
ONE NEVER NEEDS TO SEND OUT FOR FOOD IN PRUNIE LAND...WHEN IT'S SO EASY TO SIMPLY GRAB A HANDFUL OF WALL AND CHOW DOWN!


BUT MY REAL PRIDE AND JOY IS ALGERNON! I CREATED HIM FROM A STUMP! HE'S GOT WINGS MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN A BUTTERFLY... A FACE AS FAIR AS AN ANGEL.


YOU'D THINK WITH ALL THOSE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, I COULD RELAX A BIT...BUT A GODDESS' WORK IS NEVER DONE!
WHY ONLY THIS MORNING I WAS TALKING WITH OOGIE...AND HE TOLD ME THAT YOU COULDN'T CONSIDER YOURSELF A TRUE GOD UNTIL YOU WALKED ON WATER!
SO NATURALLY I HAD TO GET OUT THERE AND PROVE MYSELF! EASY AS PIE, TOO, UNTIL I STUBBED MY TOE ON THAT DAMNED WAVE!

AHEM...WELL...I THINK WE'VE HEARD ENOUGH, MS....MS....
YES, OF COURSE!
GOD!
THAT STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN, HOWEVER, YOUR SOURCE OF INCOME OR HOW WE MAY TAX IT...
...AND THAT IS, AFTER ALL, WHAT WE ARE HERE FOR, ISN'T IT, MY DEAR!

YOU DON'T SEEM TO HAVE **UNDERSTOOD** WHAT I SAID, MISTER...

...I'M GOD!

YOU MUST HAVE CERTAIN **TAX EXEMPTIONS** FOR RELIGIOUS FIGUREHEADS!

FOR THE **POPE**, YES... FOR **GOD**... **NO!**

AND NOW, MISS, YOU MUST **CEASE** THIS DELUSION OF **ALMIGHTINESS!**

EVERYONE KNOWS GOD IS A **MAN!** HOW CAN **YOU**... A MERE **WOMAN--?**

AH AH! WATCH YOUR TONGUE, POPCORN...LEST I TRANSFORM YOU INTO A PREGNANT **WARTHOG!**

YOU DARE THREATEN A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE **IRS?**

GUARDS!

TAKE THIS WENCH TO THE **MUNCHKINS!**

UH, ER...EXCUSE ME, SIR! BUT I REALLY DON'T THINK THAT **WISE**. Y'SEE, PRUNIE REALLY IS **ALL** SHE CLAIMS ..AND IT'S REALLY BEST NOT TO **UPSET** HER!

NOW SEE HERE, YOU SNOTNOSE MISANTHROPE! WE HAVEN'T COME TO THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE TO BE BULLIED BY A COUPLE OF **TAX DODGERS!**

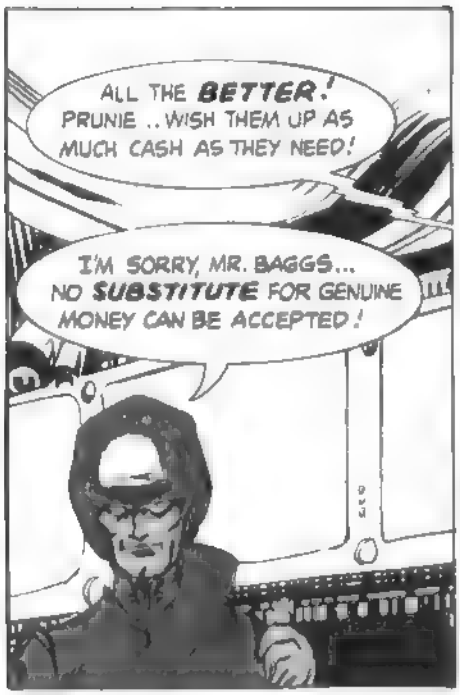
YOU POMPOUS, BELLIGERANT, PENNY-PINCHING **SCROUNGER!** HOW **DARE** YOU SPEAK TO MY NUMBER ONE IDOLATOR THAT WAY!

WHY, I'VE A MIND TO **SMITE** YOU WITH A PILLAR OF **SALT!**

PRUNIE! GENTLEMEN... **PLEASE!** WE'RE GETTING **NOWHERE** LIKE THIS! NOW I SUGGEST YOU PAY WHAT YOU **OWE**, SO WE CAN BE ON OUR WAY!

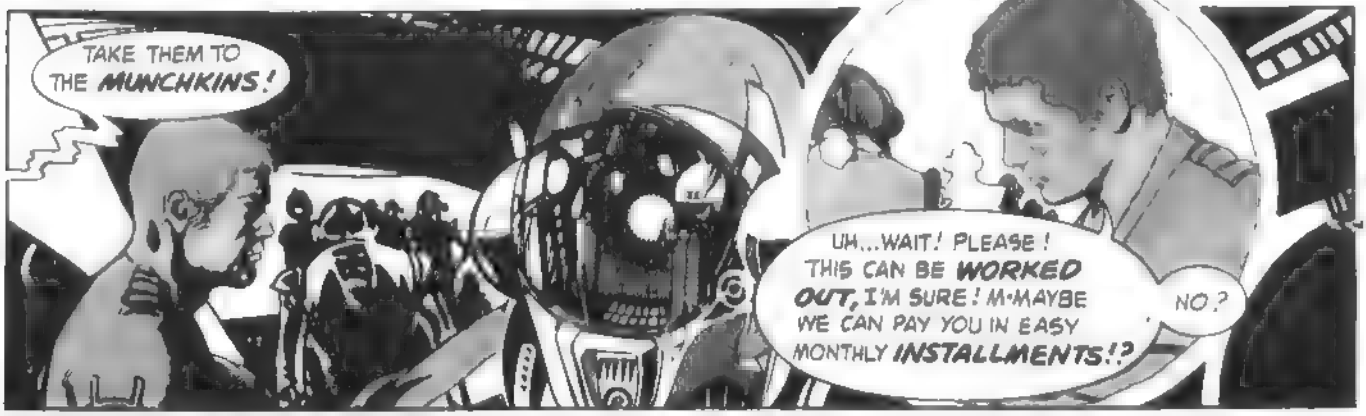
SO, OKAY... THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE FIGURES WE OWE THEM MONEY! **FINE!** PRUNIE...YOU CAN JUST **CONJURE UP** ALL THE GOLD AND RUBIES AND PRECIOUS STONES WE NEED TO PAY OUR DEBT... AND THIS WHOLE THING WILL BE RESOLVED!

SORRY! WE CAN ONLY ACCEPT A **CERTIFIED CHECK** OR **CURRENCY!**


ALL THE BETTER! PRUNIE ..WISH THEM UP AS MUCH CASH AS THEY NEED!
I'M SORRY, MR. BAGGS... NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GENUINE MONEY CAN BE ACCEPTED!

B-BUT PRUNIE'S CURRENCY WILL BE AS GOOD AS THE REAL THING!

OBVIOUSLY YOU'RE NOT AWARE THAT COUNTERFEITING IS A CRIME, SIR!
IF YOU INSIST ON HOLDING OUT ON THE IRS, THERE'S BUT ONE THING WE CAN DO!
GUARDS!


TAKE THEM TO THE MUNCHKINS!
UH...WAIT! PLEASE! THIS CAN BE WORKED OUT, I'M SURE! M-MAYBE WE CAN PAY YOU IN EASY MONTHLY INSTALLMENTS!?
NO?

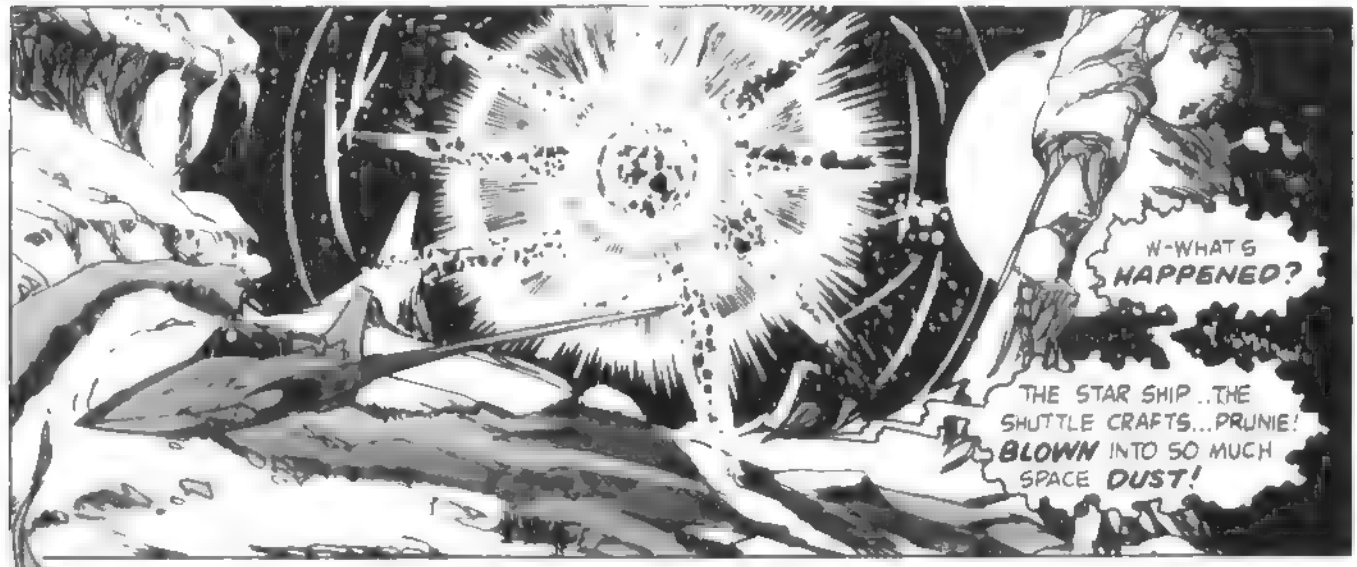
T-THEN HOW ABOUT WE WORK IT OFF? PRUNIE'S TERRIFIC AT WASHING DISHES...AND I CAN ALWAYS PUMP MUNCHKIN GAS...!
T-THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO TO SOLVE THIS LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING! ANYTHING BUT THE MUNCHKIN MUNCHERS!

THERE IS SOMETHING WE CAN DO, LEROY!
N-NO, PRUNIE...!
I CAN BLAST THESE MISERLY SCROUNGERS CLEAN INTO NOTHINGNESS!

OUT OF THE WAY, LEROY... I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THEIR THIEVERY!

PRUNNNNE .. NOOO!
GOOD LORD! PRUNIE ZAPPED ME INTO MY SPACER!
BUT WHAT'S SHE GOING TO DO TO THOSE POOR TAX MEN?

OH NO! EVEN PRUNIE'S POWERS COULDN'T STOP THEM...! THEY'RE COMING AFTER ME!
THEY MUST'VE SENT EVERY MUNCHKIN IN THEIR ARSENAL! I FEEL LIKE DOROTHY FLEEING TO THE SAFETY OF OZ!
B-BUT WHAT OF PRUNIE?


W-WHAT'S HAPPENED?
THE STAR SHIP ..THE SHUTTLE CRAFTS...PRUNIE! BLOWN INTO SO MUCH SPACE DUST!

G-GOOD LORD! M-MY PRUNIE . MY BEAUTIFUL, SWEET, INNOCENT GOD-LIKE PRUNES...
.. I CAN'T BELIEVE . SHE BLEW HERSELF AWAY JUST SO I WOULDN'T HAVE TO PAY BACK TAXES...!
-SOB!- W-WHAT LOYALTY! WHAT DEVOTION! WHAT LOVE!
I-I'LL NEVER FORGET HER FOR THIS .. EVER!
I WONDER IF OOG WILL CONJUR ME UP A NICE REDHEAD TO HELP ME GET OVER MY GRIEF?

AND THUS IT WAS...I LANDED MY SHUTTLE SHIP WITH A **TEAR** IN MY EYE AND A **FROG** IN MY THROAT MOURNING THE WOMAN TO WHOM I HAD GROWN SO **CLOSE** IN SO SHORT A TIME!

I VOWED TO **BREAK** THE NEWS GENTLY TO OOG, FOR I KNEW HE WOULD TAKE PRUNIE'S LOSS EVEN HARDER THAN I.

IT WASN'T EVERY DAY THAT A GIRLFRIEND AND A GOD WENT UP IN ONE DEPT WHISP OF **SMOKE**!

I WAS STILL **CHOKING** ON MY GRIEF, TRYING TO DECIDE ON A SUBTLE WAY OF BREAKING THE NEWS TO OOG...WHEN I HEARD A FAMILIAR VOICE, GENTLY CALLING MY NAME...!

HEY, **POPCORN!** WAIT UP!

P-PRUNIE?

MY JOY KNEW NO BOUNDS AS I SAW HER STANDING THERE IN ALL HER OPPULENT **GLORY**. MY DREAMS OF A SHAPELY **RED-HEAD** WERE INSTANTLY DASHED INTO OBLIVION!

Y-YOU'RE **ALIVE!?**

OF COURSE I'M ALIVE! YOU DIDN'T THINK I WAS GONNA LET THAT STINK BOMB TOUCH **ME?**

STINK BOMB?

YOU MEAN IT WASN'T EVEN A **REAL** BOMB?

LEROY! HOW COULD YOU **THINK** SUCH A THING?

I DIDN'T WANT TO **HURT** THOSE POOR TAXMEN...I ONLY WANTED TO PUT THEM IN THEIR PROPER PLACE!

AND WHAT **BETTER** PLACE FOR THE IRS THAN UNDER A PILE OF--!

OH ..FOR ONCE, MY LOVE, I COULDN'T **AGREE** MORE!

PRUNIE MAY HAVE HAD HER DRAWBACKS WHEN IT CAME TO GODHOOD...BUT **SOME** OF THE THINGS SHE COULD DO WITH HER POWERS WOULD'VE MADE OOGIE'S FACE **BLUSH**...!

PRUNIE AND I SPENT THE REST OF THE NIGHT CAMPING BY A ROMANTIC FIRE, SWAPPING BUCK BLASTER LIES, NECKING AND DOING THE THINGS REAL SPACE HEROES NEVER WRITE **HOME** ABOUT!

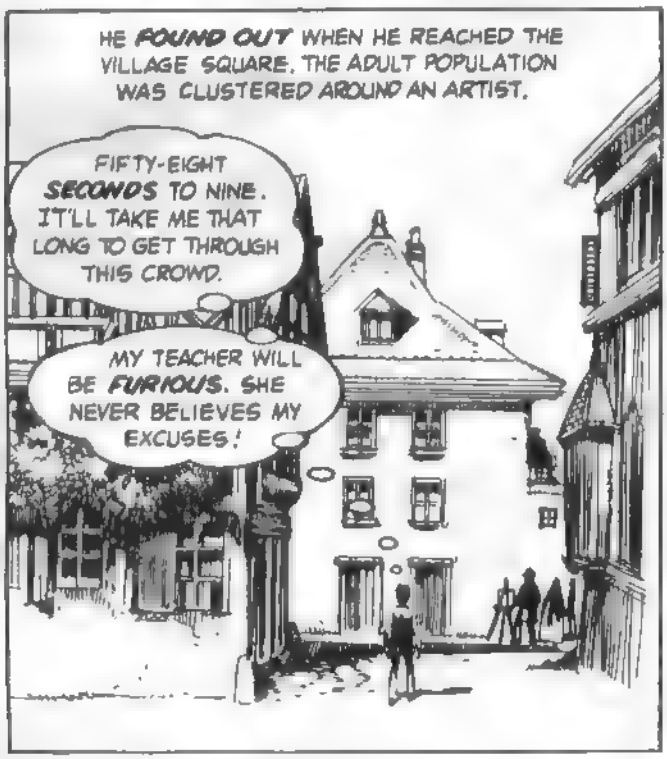
END

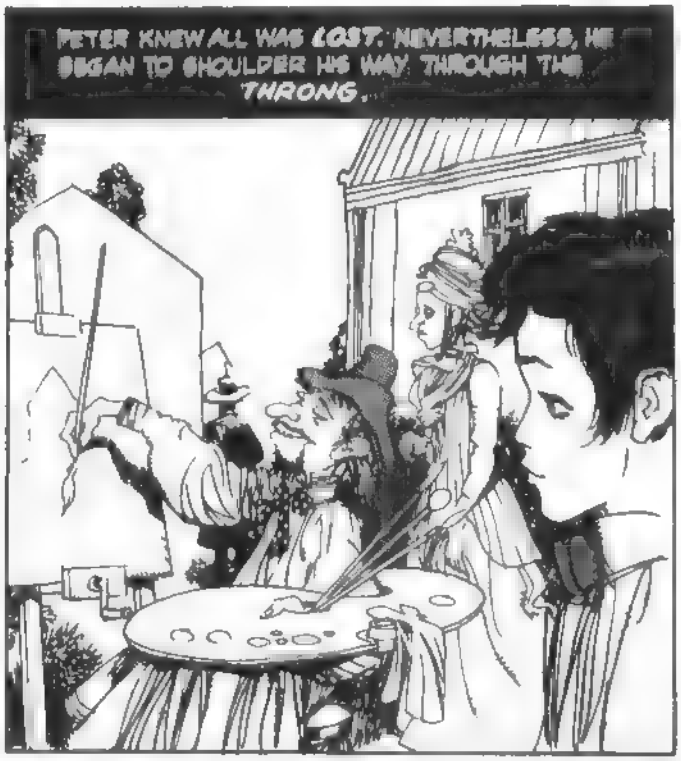
Tales of Peter HYPNOS

The Silver Key

ONE BRIGHT SPRING MORNING, *PETER HYPNOS* WAS HURRYING TO SCHOOL. BUT THE *SHORT CUT* HE TOOK CIRCLED THE LAKE IN THE *OPPOSITE* DIRECTION.

HE REACHED THE VILLAGE MERE *SECONDS* BEFORE THE NINE O'CLOCK SCHOOL BELL CHIMED. TO HIS AMAZEMENT, THE USUALLY CROWDED STREETS WERE *DE-SERTED*. OBVIOUSLY, THE CHILDREN WERE IN SCHOOL...BUT *WHERE* WAS EVERYBODY ELSE?





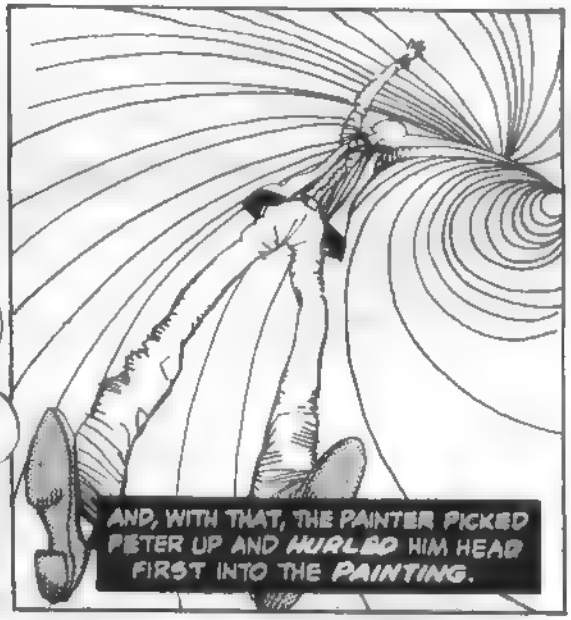
STORY AND ART: JOSE BEA

AHA! A HANDSOME YOUNG CHERUB! TAKE A LOOK, MY BOY, AND TELL ME HOW YOU LIKE MY PAINTING?
I'D LOVE TO... BUT I CAN ONLY STAY A SECOND. YOU SEE...

...I'M LATE. W-WHAT IS IT?

HA-HA! FUNNY CHILD, IT'S A PAINTING OF YOUR FUTURE.
IT LOOKS LIKE ABSTRACT DEPRESSIONISM TO ME! BUT I CAN'T TALK NOW. YOU SEE, I'M LATE!
BONG BONG
THAT BELL... CHIMING NINE O'CLOCK. SHOULDN'T YOU BE IN SCHOOL, LAD?

WHAT? A TEN O'CLOCK SCHOLAR? AN UNTUTORED ART CRITIC? OBVIOUSLY THE BOY NEEDS LESSONS...THE KIND I'M PREPARED TO PROVIDE.


AND, WITH THAT, THE PAINTER PICKED PETER UP AND HURLED HIM HEAD FIRST INTO THE PAINTING.

DOWN PETER FELL THROUGH SWIRLING LAYERS OF PAINT... TILL HE LANDED WITH A THUD ON THE CANVAS FAR BELOW.

AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE NOTICED THAT THE PAINTING WAS INHABITED.

IF I WERE DOROTHY, I'D THINK I'D FALLEN OVER THE RAINBOW AND INTO MUNCHKIN LAND.

PADDY WAGON 123 APPROACHING SUSPECT.

BONG BONG

I HAVE A WARRENT FOR THE ARREST OF PETER HYPNOS, TEN O'CLOCK SCHOLAR.

EEEEKKK! THERE HE IS!

GET HIM!

HALT! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

THIS OBVIOUSLY WASN'T OZ...

YOU'RE LATE! YOU'RE LATE!

...BUT MAYBE IT WAS WONDERLAND!

HERE, BOY, TAKE THIS KEY. HURRY.

IT WILL OPEN THE DOOR TO YOUR FUTURE.

USE IT... BUT DON'T LOSE IT!

PETER TURNED THE KEY WITH TREMBLING FINGERS. THE OPENED DOOR REVEALED...

THE ODDEST DESK SERGEANT PETER HAD EVER SEEN!

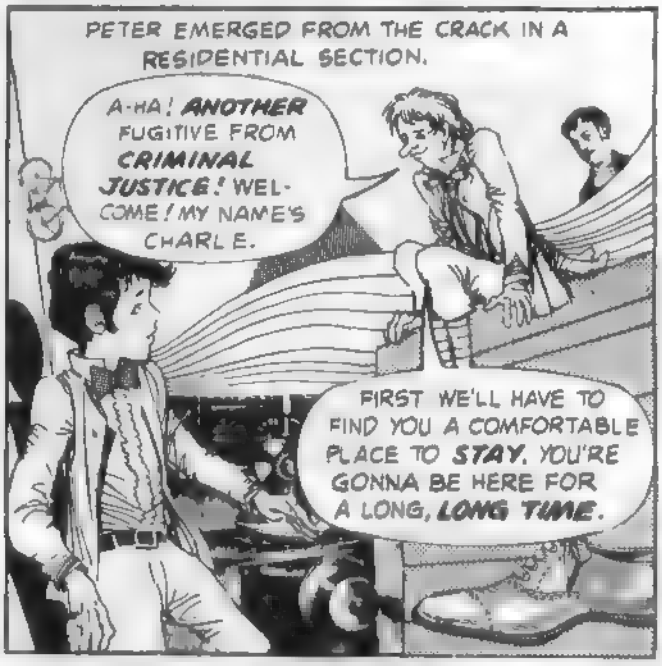
M-MY KEY!

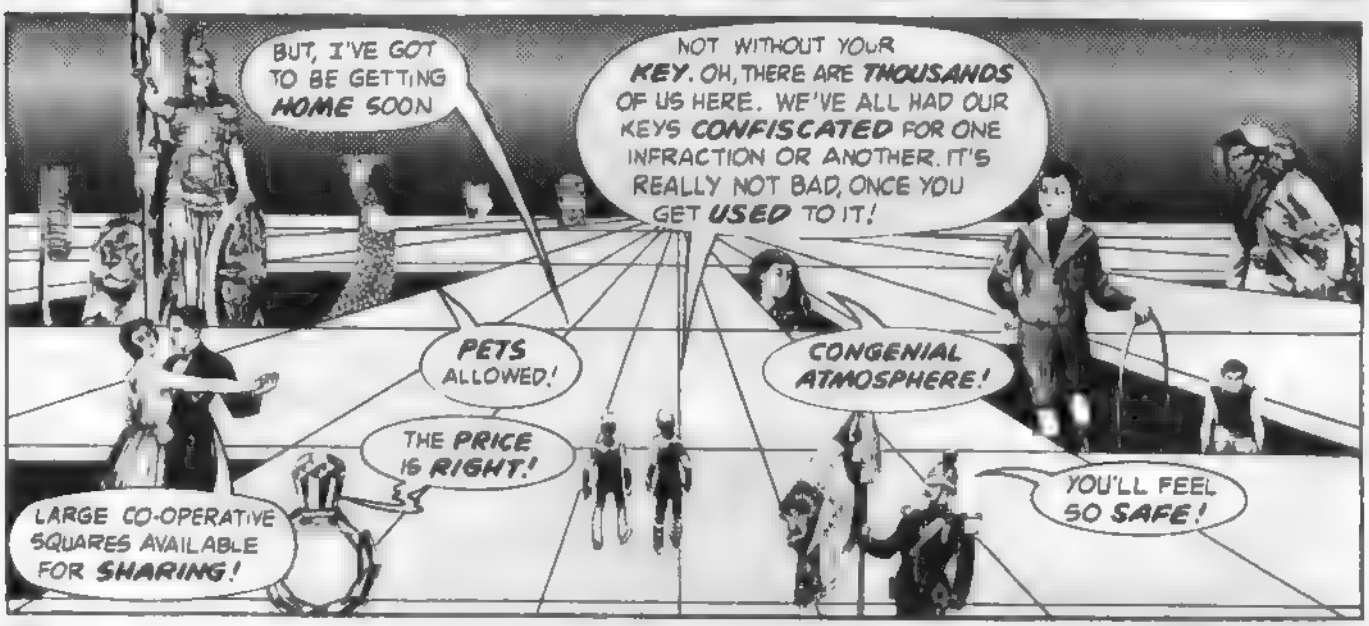
THE PRISONER WILL SURRENDER THE EVIDENCE. THE TRIAL WILL NOW BEGIN.

YOU, TEN O'CLOCK SCHOLAR HAVE MISUSED THE KEY TO KNOWLEDGE. I WILL INVOKE THE MOST STRINGENT PENALTIES.

HOW DO YOU PLEAD?
P-PLEAD? I OBJECT!
OVERRULED. GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY, HOW DO YOU FIND THE DEFENDANT?

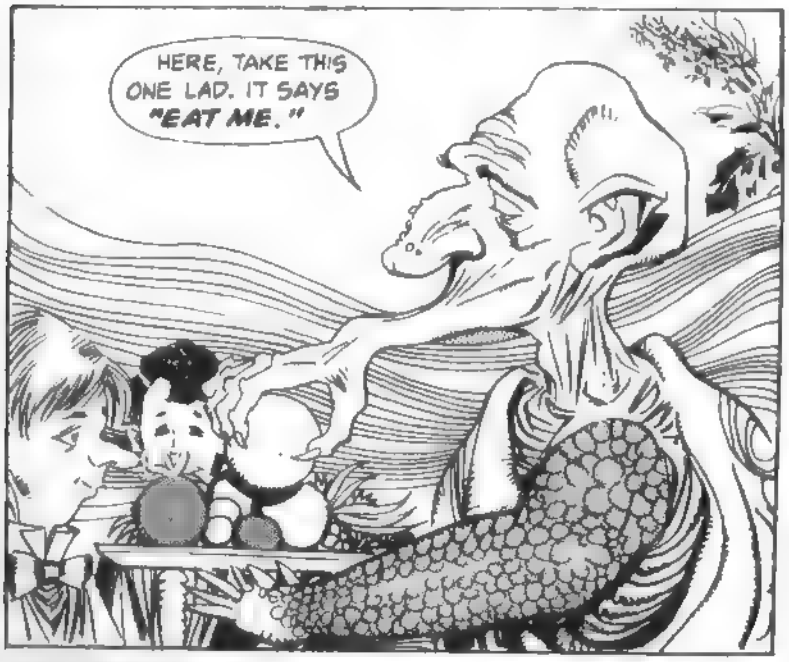
BUT BEFORE THE VERDICT WAS IN, PETER SLIPPED THROUGH A CRACK IN THE PAINT AND ESCAPED...
GUILTY
OFF WITH HIS HEAD!
...AND HIS QUICK THINKING SAVED HIM FROM A TERRIBLE FATE.


PETER EMERGED FROM THE CRACK IN A RESIDENTIAL SECTION.
A-HA! ANOTHER FUGITIVE FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE! WELCOME! MY NAME'S CHARLE.
FIRST WE'LL HAVE TO FIND YOU A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO STAY. YOU'RE GONNA BE HERE FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.


BUT, I'VE GOT TO BE GETTING HOME SOON
NOT WITHOUT YOUR KEY. OH, THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF US HERE. WE'VE ALL HAD OUR KEYS CONFISCATED FOR ONE INFRACTION OR ANOTHER. IT'S REALLY NOT BAD, ONCE YOU GET USED TO IT!
PETS ALLOWED!
CONGENIAL ATMOSPHERE!
THE PRICE IS RIGHT!
YOU'LL FEEL SO SAFE!
LARGE CO-OPERATIVE SQUARES AVAILABLE FOR SHARING!

YA, SEE, PETER, YOU'RE REALLY WELCOME HERE!
BUT I'VE GOT TO FIND ANOTHER KEY. I'VE GOT TO GO HOME.
THEY'VE GOT TO KEEP THOSE CONFISCATED KEYS SOMEWHERE. OKAY, PETER, I'LL HELP YOU LOOK.

FRESH FRUIT! FRESH FRUIT!
BUT LET'S HAVE A BITE TO EAT BEFORE WE BEGIN OUR SEARCH!

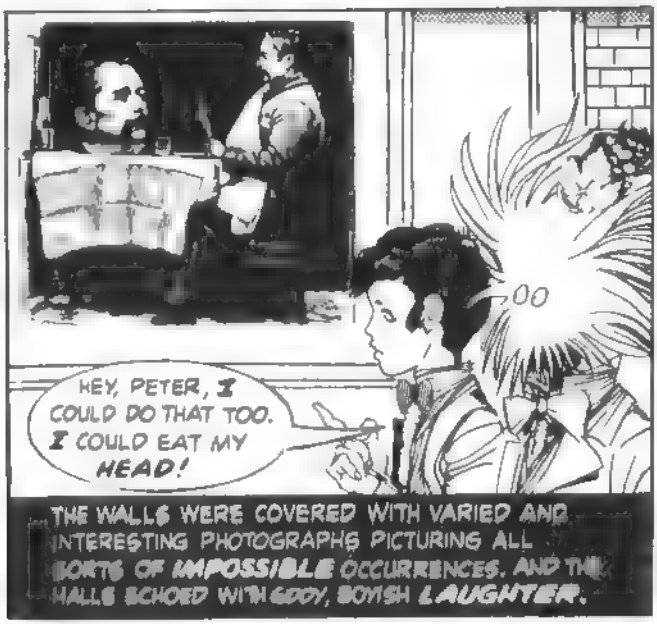

HERE, TAKE THIS ONE LAD. IT SAYS "EAT ME."

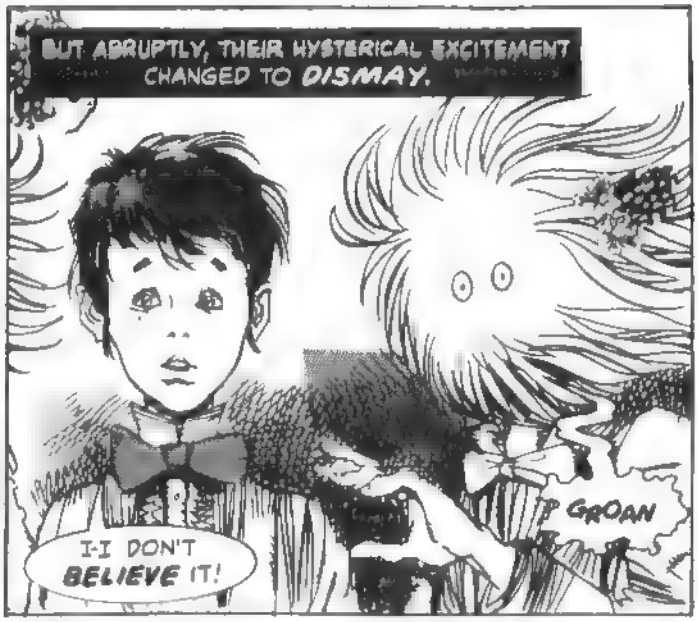
HA-HA! IF THIS WERE REALLY WONDER-LAND YOU'D TAKE A BITE AND--

PLOP
I'M ..UH... NOT HUNGRY ANYMORE!

LET THAT BE A LESSON TO YOU! BE MORE SELECTIVE IN YOUR BEHAVIOR OR YOUR BRAIN WILL TURN TO GRAPE-FRUIT AS WELL.
YOU'D HAVE KNOW BETTER IF YOU'D KEPT THE KEY OF KNOW-LEDGE.
NEVER MIND, CHARLIE. SAY, THAT'S A FLYING MACHINE OVER THERE, ISN'T IT?

GEE! THIS IS GREAT!
NO NEED TO WALK! WE CAN SEARCH FOR OUR KEYS BY AIR. HOLD ON HERE WE GO!
ONCE WE FIND OUR KEYS, I KNOW WE'LL BE ABLE TO FIX YOUR FACE!
THE TWO FRIENDS SAW RIVERS, LAKES, MOUNTAINS AND STRANGE ROCK FORMATIONS, BUT THEY DID NOT SEE THE SILVER KEY.
IF YOU FIND THE SOLUTION LET ME KNOW.
IN MOMENTS OF STRESS MANY OF US LOST OUR HEADS HERE!
DAYS LATER...
OH MIGOSH! THE MOTOR'S STOPPED!
LOOK OUT BELOW!
...AND THE STRANGE MACHINE ABRUPTLY RAN OUT OF POWER AND PLUMETED TO THE GROUND.
UNHURT, THE FRIENDS TUMBLED OUT...RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A CONVENIENTLY POSTED CROSSROADS.
TO THE HOUSE OF THE SILVER KEYS
HEY, WOW! THAT MUST BE IT! LET'S GO!
AND CHARLIE AND PETER MARCHED FORWARD TO THEIR MEETING WITH DESTINY.


HEY, PETER, I COULD DO THAT TOO. I COULD EAT MY HEAD!
THE WALLS WERE COVERED WITH VARIED AND INTERESTING PHOTOGRAPHS PICTURING ALL SORTS OF IMPOSSIBLE OCCURRENCES. AND THE HALLS ECHOED WITH GOOY, BOYISH LAUGHTER.


BUT ABRUPTLY, THEIR HYSTERICAL EXCITEMENT CHANGED TO DISMAY.
I-I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
GROAN

BEFORE THEM...HUNDREDS...THOUSANDS...MILLIONS OF KEYS WERE PILED IN MOUNTAINOUS HEAPS...STRETCHING AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE. AND THEIR KEYS COULD BE ANYWHERE AMONG THEM.
TALK ABOUT FINDING A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK!

I AM THE GUARDIAN OF CONFISCATED KEYS. WHY ARE YOU TRESPASSING IN MY WAREHOUSE?
WE'VE COME FOR OUR KEYS.

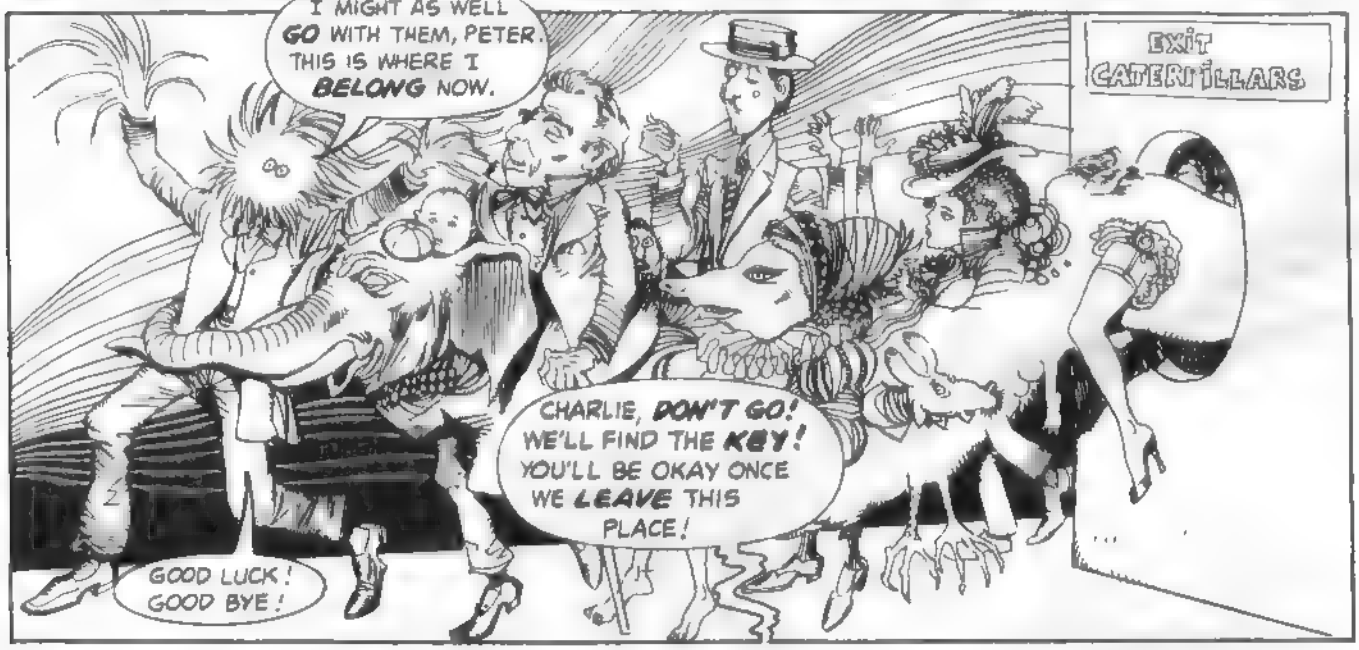
THEN YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE, YOUNG FELLOW!
FIND YOUR KEY AND OPEN THE DOOR! IF YOU CAN. HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

P-PETER, I DON'T THINK WE HAVE A CHANCE.

I-I FEEL STRANGE... QUIVERING. M-MY HANDS... THEY'RE CHANGING. MY BODY'S TURNING INTO A PLANT...JUST LIKE MY HEAD.

EVEN IF I MANAGE TO FIND THE KEY, I CAN'T GO HOME THIS WAY. ALL I'D BE GOOD FOR IS A FREAK SHOW!

C'MON! JOIN THE CROWD! SING! DANCE! COME ALONG!
NO NEED TO CHANGE. WE LIKE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE!
COME ON, CHARLIE!


I MIGHT AS WELL GO WITH THEM, PETER. THIS IS WHERE I BELONG NOW.
EXIT CATERPILLARS
CHARLIE, DON'T GO! WE'LL FIND THE KEY! YOU'LL BE OKAY ONCE WE LEAVE THIS PLACE!
GOOD LUCK! GOOD BYE!

POOR CHARLIE! OH, WELL, I HAVEN'T ANYTHING TO LOSE BUT TIME...AND WASTING TIME IS WHAT GOT ME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE.
I'LL TRY THIS KEY... AND IF IT DOESN'T FIT, I'LL SIMPLY TRY ANOTHER!

IT WORKED! WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY COINCIDENCE THAT THE FIRST KEY I TRIED SHOULD OPEN THE DOOR.
AND THAT IS WHY PROCRASTINATION NEVER PAYS.
CLICK

WHY, IF YOUR FRIEND HAD TRIED EVEN ONE KEY, HE'D BE OUT IN THE REAL WORLD WITH YOU. BECAUSE ALL THESE KEYS ARE TO THAT SAME LOCK ...AND EVERY KEY OPENS THE DOOR TO KNOWLEDGE.
KEEP THE KEY, BOY. DON'T LOSE IT AGAIN.

YIPPEEE I'M HOME!
PETER JUMPED OUT OF THE PAINTING...MUCH TO THE CONSTERNATION OF AN OLD GENTLEMAN WHO HAPPENED TO BE STANDING NEARBY, AND RAN HOME TO TELL HIS MOTHER.

MOTHER, MOTHER! YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHERE I'VE BEEN!
I KNOW WHERE YOU HAVEN'T BEEN! SCHOOL! AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY FAIRY TALES FROM YOU, YOUNG MAN. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

END

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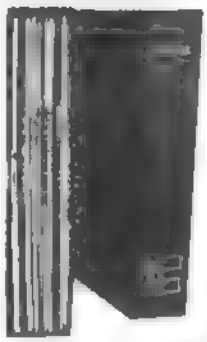

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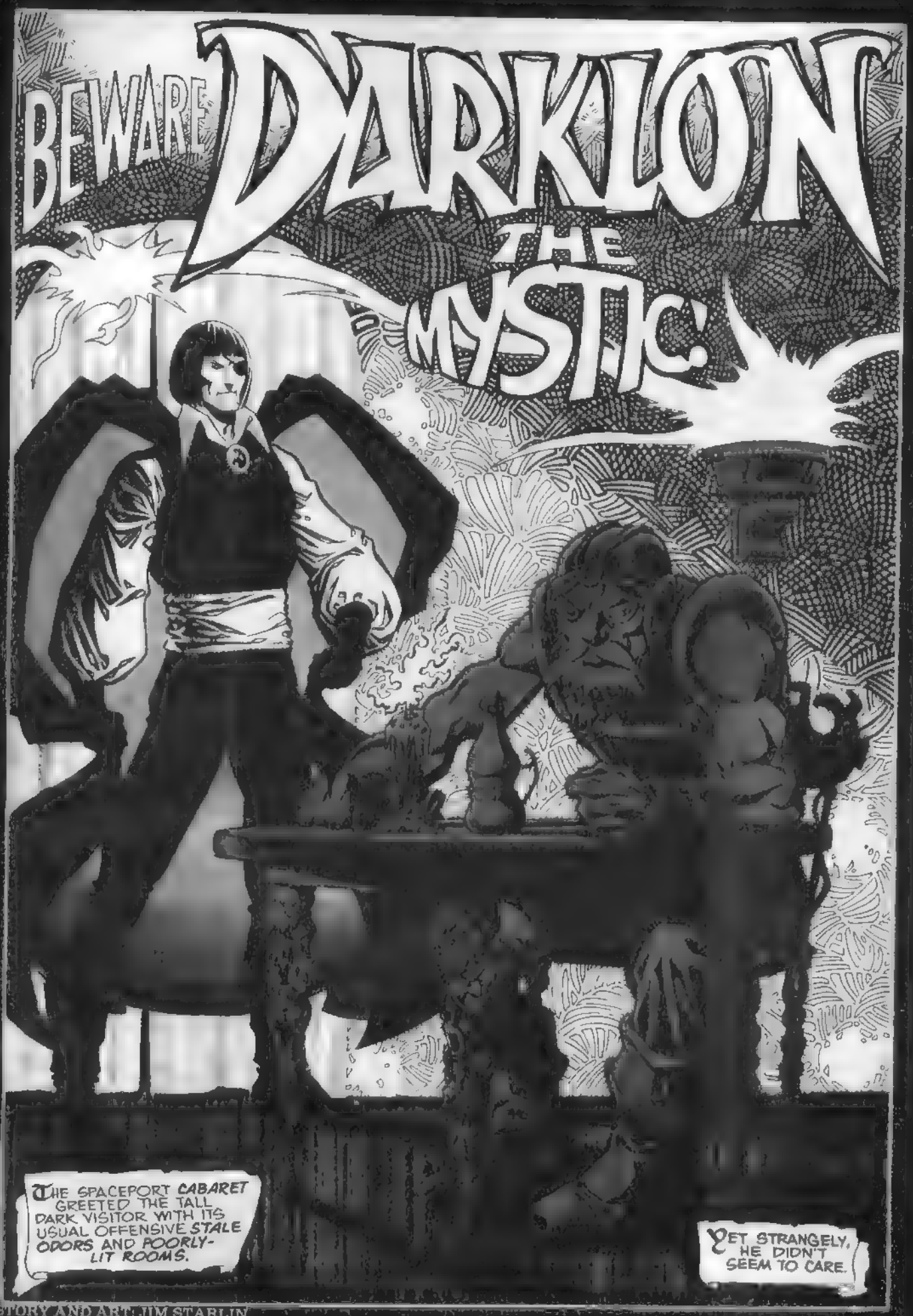


STORY AND ART: JIM STARLIN

THE STRANGER HAD THE LOOK OF A PERSON WHO WAS ABOUT TO COMPLETE AN ARDUOUS, YET WORTHWHILE TASK
CRUEL PLEASURE GLEAMED IN HIS EYE.
GREETINGS!
MIGHT A FELLOW WAYFARER JOIN YOU IN A TIPPING OF MUGS?
HUH... OF COURSE.
HIS VOICE SAID 'YES', YET THE TENSION THAT RADIATED FROM THE ALPHAN SCREAMED HIS PROTEST AT THIS INTRUSION.
THE DARK ONE READ THIS AND GRINNED WOLFISHLY, FOR BOTH MEN KNEW THAT HE WAS TO SET THE RULES FOR THE GAME THEY WERE ABOUT TO PLAY
FOR MOMENTARY ETERNITIES THEY MINUTELY INSPECTED AND DETERMINED IF THE MAN ACROSS THE TABLE WAS WHAT THEY HAD EXPECTED TO MEET.
BOTH CONCLUDED THAT THEY HAD VISUALIZED A MORE OMINOUS FOE, YET REALIZED THAT LOOKS ARE USUALLY DECEPTIVE.
BARKEEP, A BOTTLE OF GAMMABSINTHE!
I'D TAKE CARE WITH THAT DRINK, STRANGER..
IT'S BEEN KNOWN TO DRIVE MEN MAD.
MADNESS HOLDS NO TERROR FOR ME...
...VERY LITTLE IN THIS UNIVERSE DOES.
BUT YOU...
...YOU LOOK LIKE FEAR IS A NEW-FOUND FRIEND!
YOU'VE THE FEEL OF A HUNTED BEAST ABOUT YOU.
AS IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHY...
LET'S SAY, FOR THE SAKE OF AMUSEMENT, THAT I DON'T.
TELL ME YOUR TALE, FRIEND... ENTERTAIN ME.

THE ALIEN REACTED TO THE REMARK LIKE A CORNERED RAT ABOUT TO SELL HIS LIFE AT THE HIGHEST PRICE HE COULD MUSTER. THEN THE MOMENT PASSED, AN AIR OF CALM RESIGNATION CAME OVER HIM.

VERY WELL, IF IT'S BLACK ENTERTAINMENT YOU SEEK...

...WHO AM I TO DENY YOU.

AS YOU KNOW MY NAME IS KOPH-FAN.

I AM A PROFESSIONAL ASSASSIN.

"RECENTLY I WAS OFFERED AN EXCEPTIONALLY WELL PAYING CONTRACT ON A WELL-KNOWN PLANETARY HEAD.

"MY TARGET WAS TO BE A CERTAIN CROWN PRINCE NAMED DARKLON."

THIS DARKLON WOULD BE NO EASY MARK.

SPECIAL AID WOULD BE NEEDED FOR THIS JOB...

"... AID SUCH AS KRAYLOCK, A MASSIVE JOVIAN..

"... BAK STAP, A WEAPONS EXPERT, AND

"... YOU-MAR, A TELEPATHIC ASSASSIN."

I KNEW THESE MEN WOULD BE NEEDED, FOR DARKLON IS A PRINCE OF FABLED NEBULARIA...

... A WORLD WHICH, OF OLD, PRODUCED A RACE OF WARRIORS WHO ONCE RULED A THOUSAND PLANETS.

PLUS, DARKLON IS RUMORED TO BE A SORCERER WHO TRAFFICS WITH DARK DEMONS FROM OUT OF THE PAST.

I HAD NO INTENTION OF JOINING THE LONG LIST OF VICTIMS OF ATROCITIES ATTRIBUTED TO THIS DEADLY MYSTIC

"WE WENT TO GREAT PAINS TO BE ABLE TO LAND ON DARKLON'S PRIVATE PLANETOID, GRIMMORE, UNDETECTED...HOPING THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE WOULD AID US.

"YET IT IS WE WHO WERE SHOCKED TO FIND THE PLANETOID'S LONE STRUCTURE, CASTLE COLD, UNDEFENDED AND UNFORTIFIED.

"THIS SEEMED INCONGRUOUS CONSIDERING DARKLON'S FEARSOME LEGEND AND REPUTED ARMY OF ENEMIES. YET WE ENTERED THE CASTLE COLD FULLY ARMED... AND STILL UNCHALLENGED.

"NEVER IN MY MOST WILDLY OPTIMISTIC SCHEMINGS DID I EXPECT TO REACH THE FORTRESS MASTER BEDROOM WITHOUT A BATTLE ROYAL. YET THERE WE STOOD, UNTOUCHED AND BLOOD THIRSTY.

"THE DREADFUL FEELING OF HAVING STEPPED INTO A *TRAP* POUNDED AT US AS WE CREPT INTO THE CHAMBER, APPARENTLY *UNNOTICED*.

"WE FOUGHT DOWN THE *TERROR*, QUICKLY ENCIRCLED THE VEILED *FOUR-POSTER* AND...

"...EMPTIED OUR *CYNO BLASTERS* INTO IT.

"WE HEARD THE PITIFUL GASPS OF SURPRISED *AWAKENING*, SHOCKED *REALIZATION* AND *FINALITY*.

"...THE *PITIFUL PLAYTHING* DARKLON HAD LEFT BEHIND UNGUARDED.

"THAT WAS WHY IT HAD BEEN SO *EASY*. DARKLON HAD *NEVER* BEEN THERE.

"HIS DEFENSES WERE OBVIOUSLY *MYSTICAL* AND ONLY OPERATED WHEN HE WAS PRESENT.

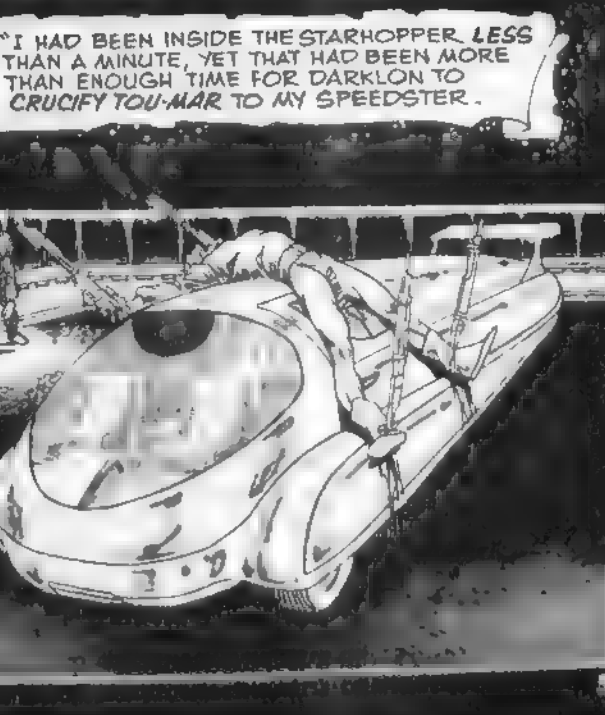
"I PULLED BACK THE GOSSAMER VEIL TO CONFIRM THE *KILL*, EXPECTING TO SEE DARKLON'S *BLOODY FORM*. INSTEAD I FOUND...

"WE TOLD *BLOWN IT*. BLOWN IT *BAD*, SO..

"...WE *RAN*.

"OUR ONLY CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING HAD RESTED ON CATCHING THE DEMON WOLF UNAWARES. WE HAD FAILED TO DO THAT. WE HAD *FAILED*.

"NOW OUR SOLE OBJECTIVE WAS PUTTING AS MANY *LIGHT YEARS* AS POSSIBLE BETWEEN OURSELVES AND DARKLON'S LEGENDARY *VENGEANCE*."



"THEN I FELT SOMETHING *CRUMBLE* AND HEARD THE BLOOD-CHILLING *SCREAM* OF A MAN WHO WAS ABOUT TO *DIE HORRIBLY*, AND HIS FRANTIC FOOTSTEPS RACING OFF INTO THE *NIGHT*.

"A SHORT TIME AGO MY SENSES *CLEARED* AND I WAS ASTOUNDED TO FIND MYSELF STILL ALIVE AND IN THIS *CABARET*..."

...WHERE I'VE REMAINED, GULPING DOWN AS MUCH *LIQUID COURAGE* AS MY POOR TWISTED INNARDS COULD HANDLE WHILE WAITING FOR DARKLON TO FIND ME.

A *MOST* INTERESTING TALE

BUT TELL ME, *WHY* DO YOU SUPPOSE THIS DEMON-PRINCE HAS *WAITED* SO LONG TO FIND YOU?

THE ANSWER TO THAT IS *OBVIOUS*.

I WAS THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF THIS AFFAIR. *I* TOOK THE CONTRACT.

I'M THE *ONLY* ONE THAT KNOWS *WHO* WANTS DARKLON DEAD.

THAT'S INFORMATION DARKLON WILL WANT BEFORE *MURDERING* ME. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT'S KNOWLEDGE...

...HE'LL NEVER GET!

WHAT!? HE'S GONE!
HOW? HE WAS RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME!
WHERE!? I CAN'T LET HIM ESCAPE ME NOW!
GRRRRRAARRCH

MY ARM!
YOU'VE NO FURTHER NEED FOR IT, KOPH-FAN.
I'VE LEFT YOU ALL THAT'S REQUIRED FOR YOU TO LIVE OUT YOUR FINAL MOMENTS QUICKLY AND WITHOUT UNDUE PAIN... YOUR TONGUE.
YOUR THREE FRIENDS DIED SLOWLY AND HORRIBLY FOR DESTROYING SOMETHING I HAD NOT YET TIRED OF.
YOU CAN ELUDE THAT SAME END BY TELLING ME WHAT I WISH TO KNOW

A QUICK DEATH FOR A NAME ALL RIGHT
...I WAS HIRED BY.. KAVAR DARKHOLD!
DARKHOLD! IT CANNOT BE!
YOU LIE TO ME!
LIES!
LIES!
NO PLEASE!
LIES!
FOR IF THAT IS THE TRUTH, I AM SURELY LOST!
DARKLON THE MYSTIC IS A COLD HARD SOUL, YET EVEN HE HOLDS CERTAIN PEOPLE DEAR.
AMONG THOSE CHOSEN FEW STANDS KAVAR DARKHOLD.
FOR HE IS THE MAN I CALL.
FATHER
...AND THE NIGHT GREETED HIM LIKE A QUESTION YET TO BE ANSWERED

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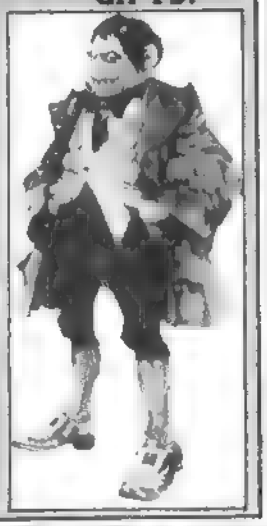

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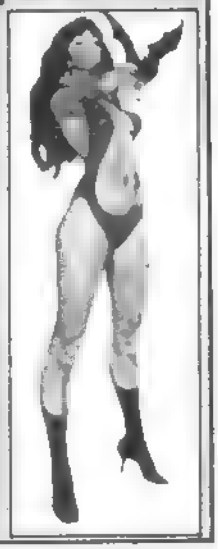

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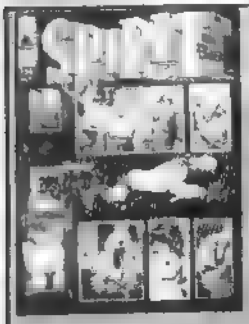

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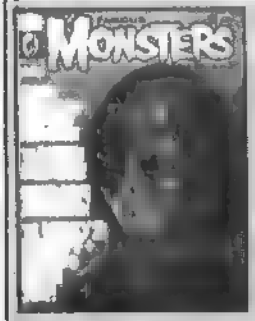

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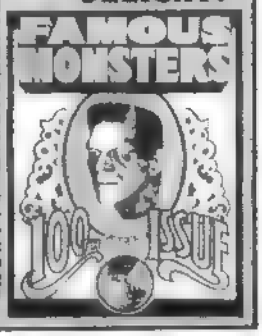

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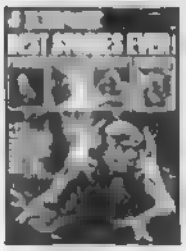
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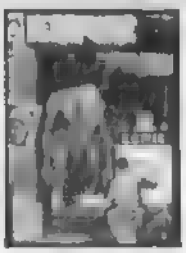
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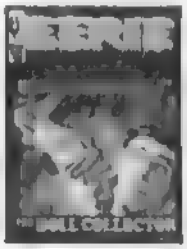
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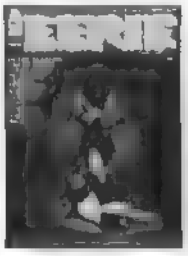
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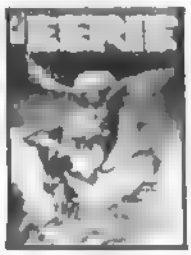
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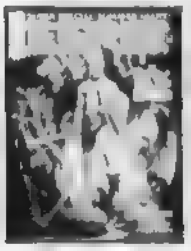
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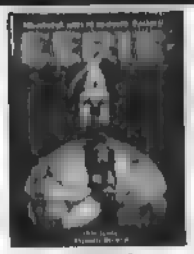
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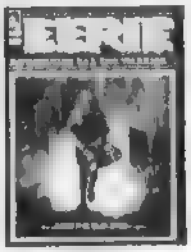
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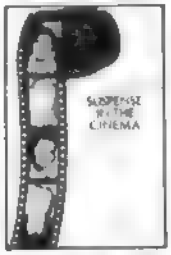

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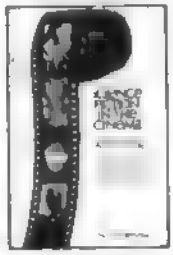

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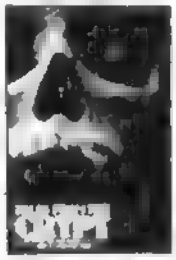

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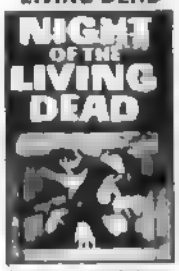

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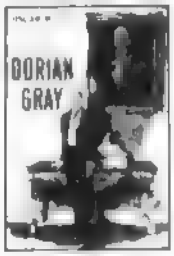

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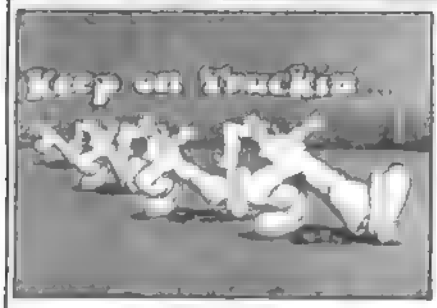

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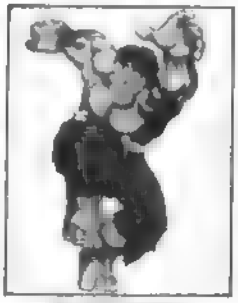

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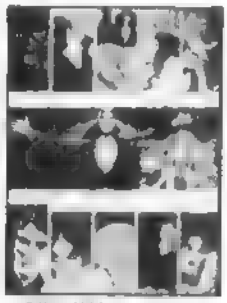

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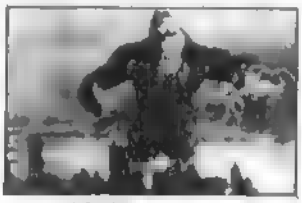

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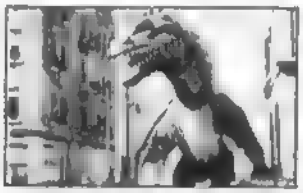

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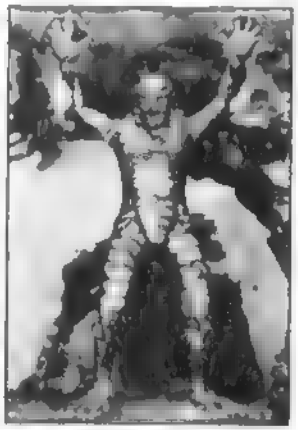

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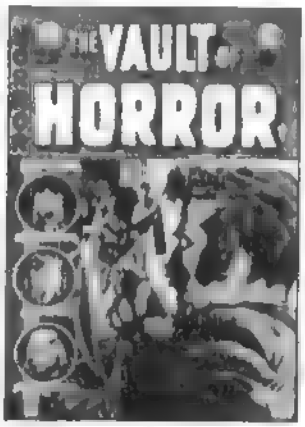

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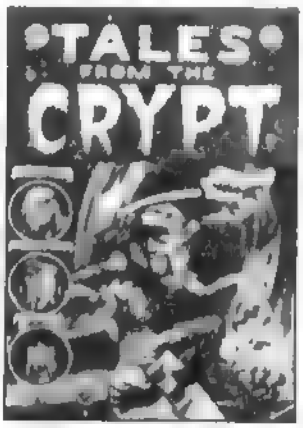

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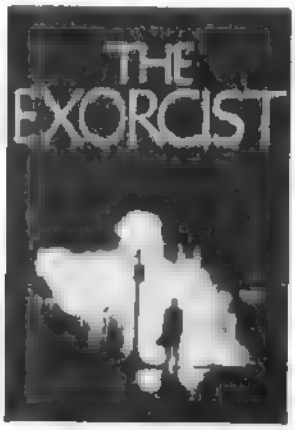

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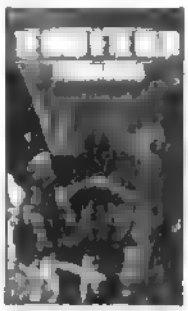

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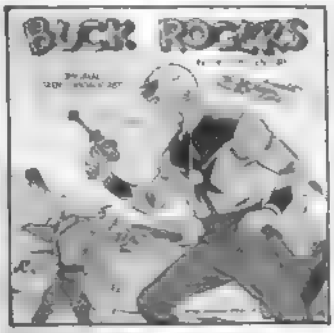

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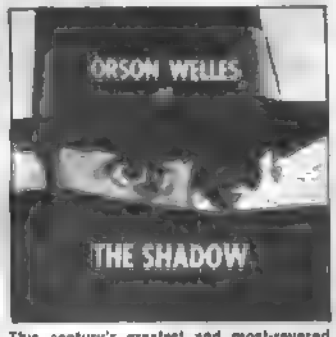

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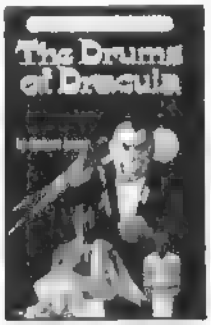

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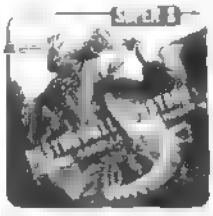

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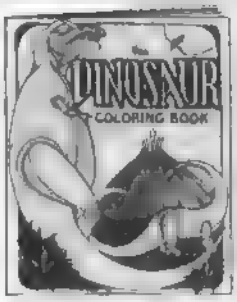

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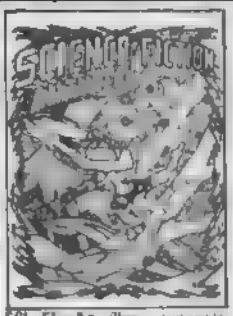

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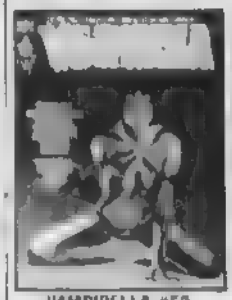

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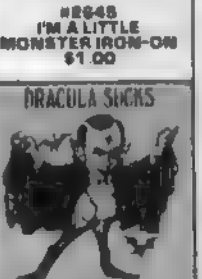

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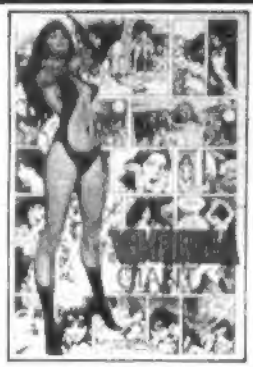

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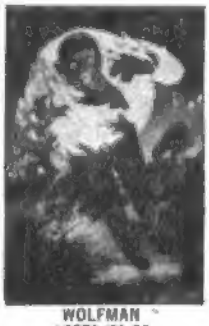

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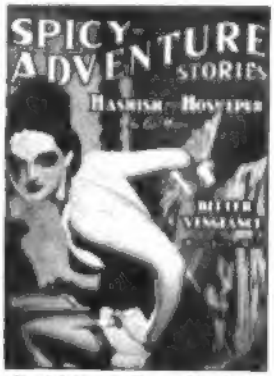

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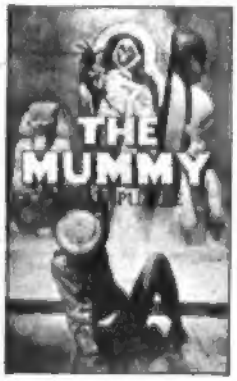

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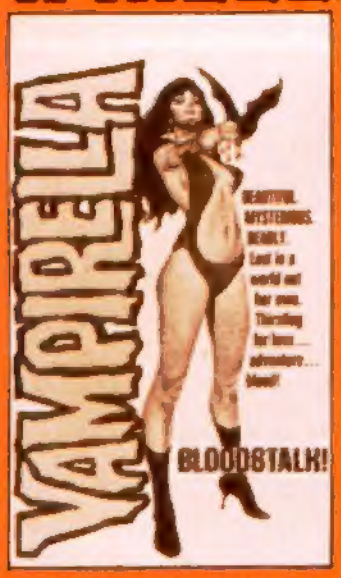
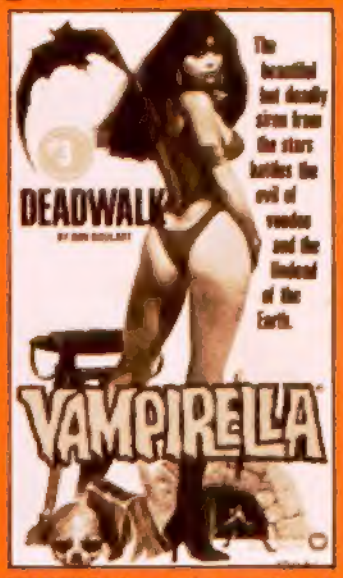
VAMPIRELLA PAPERBACK NOVELS!



BLOODSTALK recreates the spectacular origin of VAMPIRELLA! A refugee in a returning explorer rocket, whisked from her dying planet where blood flowed in rivers, VAMPIRELLA must learn to kill . . . or adapt . . . or die! Surrounded by powerful enemies, like the Cult of the mad god, Chaos, she avoids the blind vampire slayer, Conrad Van Helsing. Befriended by his son, Adam, and by the magician, Pendragon, she pits herself against the evil Cult of Chaos and helplessly slakes her ever-present thirst for human blood! #21194/$1.25

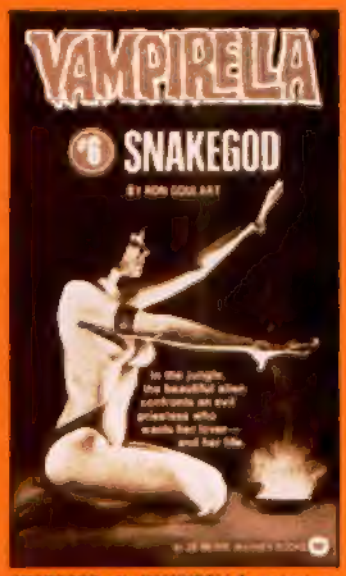
ON ALIEN WINGS takes VAMPIRELLA to a secluded Hollywood estate where the owner has devised a formula for immortality . . . involving a blood-starved VAMPIRELLA! On the Hollywood estate . . . on a "restful" Caribbean cruise . . . on a desert island, she and Pendragon are hounded by threats of evil, the demonically macabre, the Cult of Chaos! Pursued incessantly by Conrad Van Helsing, who must fight the growing affection of his son for the beautiful murderous alien, she must bow to her fate . . . or conquer it! #21196/$1.25



DEADWALK brings voodoo, zombies and human sacrifice into direct conflict with VAMPIRELLA's vow to fight the evil Cult of Chaos. Dread forces conspire to destroy Pendragon and capture VAMPIRELLA . . . the perfect candidate for human sacrifice by the dastardly Papa Jambee and his zombies. The glitter-filled world of rock seems an unlikely haven for the walking dead, but to VAMPIRELLA's dismay, a zombie stalks the frantic world of rock musicians. Aided by Adam, VAMPIRELLA wages battle against Chaos! #21197/$1.25

BLOOD WEDDING! Words to chill even a soul as stout and strong as VAMPIRELLA's! Lured to the secluded castle of the mysterious Count Mordante by promises of a goodly audience and excellent reimbursement, VAMPIRELLA and Pendragon find that they have been chosen to provide a deadly and macabre entertainment. The Count has devised a dramatic finale to VAMPIRELLA's act! He had scheduled her appearance in a command performance as the bride of the mad god she has sworn to fight . . . the evil, insane Chaos! #21207/$1.25

DEATHGAME takes VAMPIRELLA to the sun-filled, fun-filled Riviera, where men, fascinated by gambling, stake their lives on the turn of the wheel. Here VAMPIRELLA, too, falls victim to temptation. The sun lulls her fears . . . the lapping waters weaken her resolve. Against reason, she is lured into a forbidden love with a man she cannot resist . . . a man whose dangerous connections with the voraciously evil Cult of Chaos can be the undoing of the beautiful, deadly vampiress! #21208/$1.25



SNAKEGOD pits VAMPIRELLA against an enemy more vicious than any she has yet encountered. The incredible Cobra Queen! Priestess of a religious cult deep in the jungles of Southeast Asia! Able to transform at will into the body of a deadly, venomous snake! Presiding over profane rites in a vast, ruined jungle temple. Owner of vast fabled treasure of gold and jewels. The Cobra Queen wants Adam Van Helsing in exchange for her mortally wounded lover and consort. And she wants VAMPIRELLA dead! #21209/$1.25

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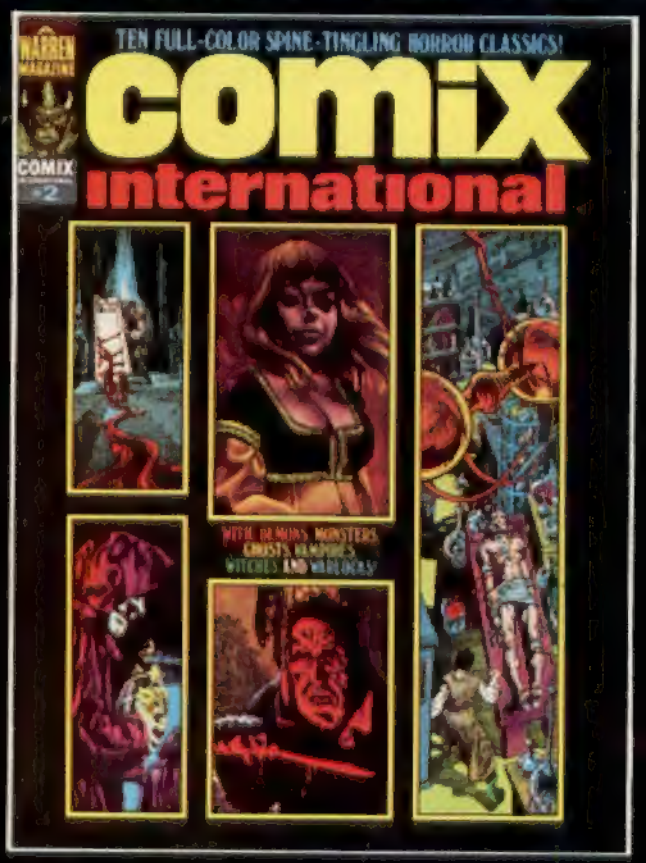
COMIX INTERNATIONAL No. 2



Fly on ebon wings of terror with "The Raven!" Discover the new and horrifying meaning of the year's most sacred holiday . . . "Anti-Christmas!" Journey to 1933 and learn the meaning of "The Butcher's Lonely Prayer!" All by Rich Corben! Travel to a different sphere with Esteban Maroto! Here the smell of sawdust, the roar of the crowd, means Dracula's dark universe . . . "The Circus of King Carnival!" A world of unearthly delight! Of death! Of "The Winged Shaft of Fate!" Rocket with Wally Wood to a distant galaxy . . . where monsters are merely "Manhunters!" Reed Crandall invites you just around the corner for a look at "The Beast On Bacon Street!" And beyond, Berni Wrightson's "Muck Monster" stalks! Jose Ortiz takes you to the future . . . where Big Brother is watching and cops are king! Ortiz' Orwellian "Purge" . . . where citizens do what they are told. Or else! Luis Garcia's gentle lure is the sun-swept beach of "Janis," where the rolling sea contains unmentionable horror! Ten full-color classics! 80 pages of adventure and fear! Heavy weight paper! Quality printing! Large Magazine format! COMIX INTERNATIONAL #2. #1CI2/$3.98

COMIX INTERNATIONAL No. 3

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